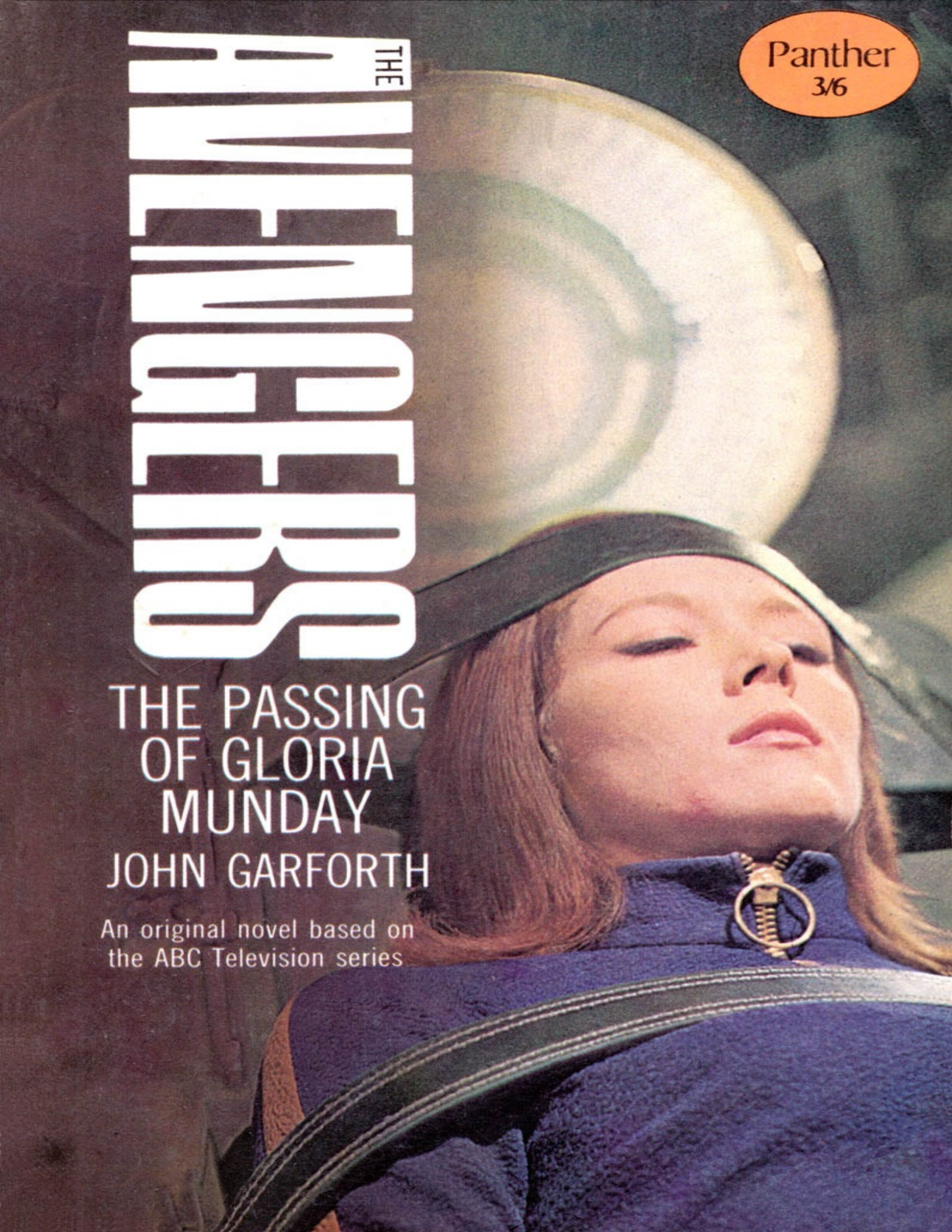
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THE AVENGERS
THE PASSING OF GLORIA MUNDAY
JOHN GARFORTH
An original novel based on the ABC Television series

six steps in the passing of Gloria Munday...

- a siren in distress rescued by Steed in his vintage Bentley...
- is taken to Blackpool — and murdered...
- by a tycoon in electronics
- whose posse of pop pirates threaten to clamber aboard the ship of state
- whereupon Emma Peel sings falsetto
- and George Washington sweeps the floor

... and the battle against pop dictators is on!

THE PASSING OF GLORIA MUNDAY is an original adventure based on ABC Television's world-famous thriller series, THE AVENGERS, starring PATRICK MACNEE as John Steed and DIANA RIGG as Emma Peel. THE AVENGERS is an ABC Television Production.

To be mobbed by delirous fans on Blackpool's fabulous 'golden mile' is a pop singer's dream of heaven.
But one of Gloria Munday's milling fans carried a knife. And so Gloria died.
Steed rang Emma: "Mrs Peel, we're needed."
Mrs Peel goes through her paces as a pop star and does it beautifully.
Steed goes to jail.
But it all comes right in a triumphantly swinging climax when a dubious electronic tycoon gets his just deserts, Emma comes number five in the charts, and Steed lands himself a job chauffering a lovely young widow.

John Garforth

The Passing of Gloria Munday

A novel based on the ABC Television series 'The Avengers'

A Panther Book

The Passing of Gloria Munday
A Panther Book

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Contents

1 - “They’re going to kill me!”
2 - “We’re needed, Mrs. Peel”
3 - “I can make you a star, baby”
4 - “John Steed, you’re remanded in custody”
5 - Emma is number five in the charts
6 - Steed breaks jail
7 - George Washington plays it cool
8 - “We can’t disrupt the Atlantic Alliance”
9 - Emma sings the blues
10 - A woman and her Black & Decker

1

“They’re going to kill me!”

John Steed’s racing triumph at Le Mans in 1929 was a fantasy, and he forgot about it as he stamped on the brakes and hauled the massive Speed Six over to the right-hand side of the road. A white wraith like a girl had flickered in his telescopic headlamps twenty-five yards ahead. Steed hooted irritably and swerved, but the girl ran forward onto his bonnet. So now he was two wheels in the ditch.

“My dear girl, if you must commit suicide there’s a perfectly good railway bridge a mile down the road!”

“I’m terribly sorry,” she gasped. “Please... I don’t know what to do!”

Steed examined the scratch on his British racing green coachwork. It was two inches long. “Never mind,” he sighed, “it’s not as bad as it might have been.” Lucky she hadn’t thrown herself in front of a modern car, all tin and perspex - that wouldn’t have stopped in twenty-three yards flat!

“You must help me. I must get back to London—”

“Dear young lady, I’m on my way to Blackpool—”

“But they’re going to kill me!”

“You should have chosen a car going the other way. Do you want me to lose the rally?”

“Rally?” She was bewildered and on the verge of tears.

Steed looked at her in sudden consternation. “Is something wrong?” She was a thin, sad creature with brown eyes like a puppy. Not a day over seventeen. Mousey hair and an unsuitable white dress that came down to her thin flanks. “You seem distraught.”

“They’re going to kill me!”

A black 8-litre passed by noisily and the driver hooted. “Travel by rail,” he shouted, “and be certain of reaching your destination.” Hearty idiot! He sped on into the night, and soon the other eighteen vintage Bentleys would be racing past.

“Jump in,” snapped Steed. “We can’t stand around here chatting.” He pushed her into the passenger seat and started the engine. It was a strain reversing out of the ditch, but luckily the earth was dry and his tyres were excellent. They

reached the middle of the road in time to block Bunny Bennett from passing in one of those super-charged Paget-Birkin things. Steed stood up and raised his bowler hat in salute.

"Are you operating a bus service?" Bennett called. "Clear that bloody wreck off the road!"

Steed took care in turning so that Bennett had no room to pass, then he roared away, quickly reaching the cruising speed of seventy-eight miles an hour. Bennett's 4-litre thing chased behind making a quite indecent row. With any luck it would blow out on the first steep hill. Steed didn't approve of "blowers" in a vintage race. "We've lost about fifteen minutes," he grumbled.

"I'm scared."

"Safest cars on the road, built when the word quality meant quality." She was still shivering. "If you're cold we can put up the hood."

She didn't answer. She watched the fields passing by on the left, stared at the derelict remains of an open cast coal mine outlined in black. Steed didn't like the Lancashire countryside, it was too flat and industrial, even the farms looked grimly northern. He was glad that the moonlight was only sufficient to wrap the place in mystery. He wondered what the girl was doing, in this barbarous part of the world. Her voice was London, secondary modern.

"Did you say someone wants to kill you?" he asked suddenly.

"Yes."

"Good lord."

They were an hour's drive from Blackpool and the black 8-litre was visible in a bright village high street ahead of them. Steed stepped hard on the accelerator and took a left fork before they entered the village. They were doing more than a hundred miles an hour when they reached the coast. "I rely on your discretion, young lady, about this short cut. After all, it's your fault I was delayed. Morally I had already won the race." Then they reached the built-up suburbia that was spread for miles around the ice cream attraction of the sea. Steed noted sadly that these places always began with homes for the aged, for the disabled, and a sprinkle of private schools.

"Who," he asked eventually, "wants to kill you?"

"I don't know." She was looking at him as if she doubted his reliability, and yet to judge from her agitation she would have to trust him. "I gave them the slip when we stopped for supper at the Golden Horseshoe. I went to the cloakroom and slipped out through the public bar."

"Who?"

"My manager and Horace Horton and Mr. Silberbaum.." She shuddered as if the very names were frightening. "They were bringing me to Blackpool so that

I'd be killed. I'm Gloria Munday."

"Hello," said Steed. "John Steed. When we finish this rally at the steps of the Victoria Hotel there's a dinner and dance to celebrate the spirit of Babe Barnato. Goes on until about three in the morning. Will you be my guest? I'm usually quite good at protecting young ladies from death and tedium."

She smiled. A broad, engaging smile that gave her a sudden pixyish beauty. "I'd love it."

"Splendid. By the way, what does your manager manage you at?"

They were passing a gas works that projected hideously into the sea and the 8-litre Bentley swung in beside them from the Preston road. It was a few yards ahead of Bunny Bennett. Steed offered up a silent prayer that the golden mile had been cleared of traffic for the finish and he opened out everything. The three cars raced abreast along the neon lit promenade, past a cheering blur of spectators and narrowly missing a Keep Left sign.

"Come on, come on," cried Gloria Munday, "cut in front of him!"

There was a bang, a cloud of smoke enveloped Bunny Bennett and he slithered with brakes screeching onto the beach. He took a small portion of fence with him. Superchargers never had been reliable. Steed always said that if you want more power you must have a bigger engine.

"We're nearly a foot in the lead," Gloria shouted. "Keep going!"

They flashed past the Victoria Hotel, struggled to pull up and follow the right incline of the road, and came to a stop symbolically by the memorial to our glorious dead. Steed shook hands with his companion. "Four and a half hours," he announced. They went back to the hotel and stared at a vulgar blue 6½-litre already parked at the foot of the steps. Not even a Speed Six, but a common 6½!

And to make matters worse there were photographers around. Hey, Gloria, smile over here. Let's have one on the bonnet. Hey, Gloria, is this a new romance? Who's the guy? Hey, Gloria!

Steed grabbed her by the hand and fled up the steps. He had never encountered such a rabble in seven years of London to Blackpool rallying. It was a private affair, for members of the club. He should have found out who she was.

The manager, august as a royal butler, met them in the foyer. "I'm terribly sorry, Mr. Steed, but I'm afraid we cannot permit Miss Munday into this hotel."

"I made my booking last Whitsun, Perkins, so don't talk nonsense. Miss Munday is my guest. Have a bottle of Remy Martin sent up to my room." He swept past into the lift. "I'll sign the register when we come down for dinner."

"You've got what I really call style," said Gloria Munday when they were safely installed in a room overlooking the sea. "What do you do? I mean, when you aren't doing a ton up the A.1 in these old bangers."

He shrugged diffidently. “I work for the government. After a fashion. And I was about to ask you the same question. It seems as if you’re famous.”

Steed had taken a quick shower and changed into formal dress while Gloria Munday had done the things that women do. It was a warm May night and they looked out across the Atlantic as they talked. Below them a swarm of people milled about the hotel entrance.

“For the last three years I haven’t met anyone who hasn’t heard of me,” said Gloria. “I live in a constant glare of press photographers and television cameras. I only exist between magazine covers, so that the Great British public can gape at me. You won’t understand, but when I first started singing in the Beat Cellar at Tottenham I thought all I needed was fame.”

“Are you a good singer?” Steed asked her.

“I’m all right - I enjoy it and that communicates. I was voted top girl singer last year in the *Melody Maker* polls.” She laughed with that completely open innocence that Steed knew would be described in the popular press as natural. “Everything a pop singer says in public is corny, like I want to be an all-round entertainer, I want to be an ordinary housewife and fall in love with an ordinary man. But by God it’s true, if I could just *meet* some nice young mechanic and get away from the publicity boys, the A & R men and the press... I’m so tired!”

“You need a holiday.”

“I know. But that isn’t why I imagine they want to kill me.”

“Why is it?”

Gloria sipped a third brandy. “I don’t know. Well, you wouldn’t believe me.” Her rigidly protestant upbringing, Steed assumed, had ensured that she didn’t turn to drugs or become an alcoholic. She just needed brandy to restore the normal vivacity of a girl of seventeen. “It’s just a lot of things - feelings - and I suppose I’m frightened of Horace Horton.”

Steed beamed proudly. “Horace Horton I have heard of. He’s managing director of Radufact Electronic Engineering Ltd. REEL, they make radar equipment.”

“And radios, records... the whole range.”

Good lord! Steed never had read the Business News section with any great attention, but he remembered now. “He put up the money for a pirate radio station. Radio Gloria!”

“That’s me.”

“A very dubious fellow,” said Steed. “But you were telling me about your feelings. Quite, I know, I shan’t understand. But I fancy another brandy before we go downstairs to mingle with the hearties. So just to pass the time... “

Gloria had already had another brandy and she poured herself a fifth.

“Something happened in America when I was there last week. Don’t ask me what. But it all changed. Nick Dickinson started acting as if he was in mourning for me, and Horace Horton began to enjoy the gruesome details of my death. Ripped to pieces by my male fans. Or whipped to death by classical music lovers. He can think of things like that, being plucked by vultures or drowned slowly on the boat. Horace Horton has a weird imagination.”

Well, some people are funny that way. Steed was more worried by her analysis of the mods and rocker (67 style) riots that were being promoted. “Is that why the manager didn’t want you in this hotel?”

“Yes. The shop keepers and café owners are all terrified. It’s all good clean fun for the coppers and the reporters, but things get smashed up. The kids, mainly, and a few deck chairs.”

“To amuse Horace Horton.”

“Yes. They’ll kill me tomorrow.”

Steed glanced down at the gaudy coloured lights on the sea front. Amusements, they proclaimed, see the two-headed lady. Have fun. Take a ride on the ghost train, watch the wall of death, try the rifle range. It was a neon world of continuous noise and aggressive spending, a crazy world in which teenage rioting made sense and the terror of a pleasant but rather thin girl was amusing. Kiss me quick, said the hats, and in the public lavatories a poster advertised, “In cases of despair ring Blackpool 20,000.”

“The fights will happen tomorrow,” said Gloria, “because everybody thinks they will. The television cameras are down there and hundreds of extra policemen have been called in. There are kids asleep under the pier...”

Somewhere down there perhaps a ringleader was moving among the kids, urging them on and boosting their morale. Steed wondered what he could possibly be saying. If the cause be not good, as Bill had put it, somebody hath a heavy reckoning to make, when all those legs, and arms, and hands, chopped off in battle, shall join together at the latter day, and cry all, We died at Blackpool, some swearing, some crying for a surgeon. And all that.

“It started because Radio Gloria kept broadcasting appeals to the kids *not* to riot this bank holiday.” Gloria banged her glass angrily on the table. “They wouldn’t have thought of fighting this weekend, except that Ellis Dee kept telling them not to. Then the newspapers took it up. The price of a peaceful world, they said, and bring back conscription. And television did a feature on *why* there would be a battle. Three well picked delinquents said it was because modern youth is bored. They’re all puppets.”

Steed smiled reassuringly and took her arm. “They sound more like actors. Shall we go downstairs to the party? I think the television people should pay

them as they pay film extras for staging a battle. Four guineas a day."

Gloria Munday was a big hit with the vintage car drivers. She had to tell them what the Rolling Stones were really like (yes, they bath every day and always wash their hands before meals) and why pop music wasn't more like Cole Porter.

"I feel safer tonight," said Gloria after the seven course meal, "than I've felt for a week. It's funny, but in this stuffy old hotel with those awful gypsy violins sawing away at 0 Sole Mio and all these first of the few types fox-trotting with their pre-war wives-" She paused while a fit of giggling threatened. "Nothing so abnormal as being killed could ever happen."

"Nobody ever commits murder after a good meal," said Steed.

"Can I stay with you tonight? And then tomorrow I'll come back to London with you. Can I?"

"Of course." He felt idiotically pleased at being escort to such a famous woman and he was relishing the venomous glances the wives were casting in Gloria's direction. Already Snowy Black-Hawkins's wife had asked Steed whether he'd care to go bathing naked in the moonlight. She was the competitive type.

"I'm only a knight in shining armour," Steed had murmured. And no, wearily, he didn't need anybody to polish his spear. "But thank you for the offer. I'm simply looking after the girl."

"You forget," said Gloria, "what real life is like when you're a pop star. Every man I know has a mistress or a nephew. I don't meet many dowdy wives. No wonder they all have problems."

The party was broken up when a sharp young man in rimless dark glasses pushed his way across to their table on the edge of the floor. He spoke with a mid-Atlantic accent. "I'm grateful to you," he said coldly, "for looking after our Gloria. We were worried about her." He took her hand and raised her to her feet.

"This is Nick Dickinson," she gasped, "my manager."

"My pleasure," said Steed.

"You can say that again. Come on, Gloria, we've had our night out. Let's go home to the boat."

"I think," Steed intruded, "Miss Munday was _anxious to stay with me until I deliver her safely back to London."

"She made a mistake. You know what women are, they change their minds all the time:"

Steed raised an eyebrow and turned to Gloria. She was staring at an ashtray in front of her. "Shall I ask him to leave, call the manager and have him ejected, or shall I fetch your coat?"

"I've changed my mind," said Gloria. "I'll have to go with him."

Nick Dickinson smiled for the first time. “It’s the car that makes all the difference, you know. My Bentley is three weeks off the assembly line.”

Somewhere out there in the darkness a boat lay at anchor, four miles off shore, tossing about in the black sea and broadcasting music-round-the-clock. Blackpqol was silent now, only the sound of the sea crashing rhythmically against the beach and the rattle of pebbles as the waves receded. Steed was always surprised again by the noise of the sea. And behind him the strange babble of the portable radio by his bed.

He had never listened to the pirate stations before. He had vaguely approved of them, because anything that upset the postmaster-general was likely to be a worthy cause, but it wasn’t really Steekl’s kind of music. He regarded pop as a visual alt and had often enjoyed R.S.G. on television.

The disc jockey was Ellis Dee and he sounded like an Australian. In his early twenties. Kept on saying Hi there night owls, this is the station with the woman’s touch at four and a half minutes to the hour of three. He played a record by Gloria Munday, which Steed found touchingly direct, bouncy and sad. The heavenly choir in the background was doing the gospel shouting bit.

“That was your radio’s own Gloria, guys and gals, and those of you who were switched on half an hour back know that Gloria is on board here tonight. We’re all just knocked out to have her. She asked me to say Hi there to all you night owls. And remember, if you’re spending this bank holiday at the seaside, keep it clean, eh? Have yourself a ball, make love or watch the girls go by, but don’t start a rumble. Okay? Good on you. Remember, we need you to listen to Radio Gloria, and this is the king himself, Elvis Presley on Radio Gloria with his revived forty-five - All Shook Up.”

Then they played a record, during which Steed fell asleep.

The trouble had already begun when he woke up. He slept until mid-day and then had a leisurely breakfast of black coffee while he read the morning papers. In two of them his photograph appeared with Gloria Munday.

Not good likenesses, and there was something sinister in being described as an ex-intelligence man. And one of them revealed to all the world that he had finished second in the race. It was a day that began badly.

At two o’clock there were small knots of teenagers along the promenade watching to see the action. A few small groups would pass by on the other side of the road and be jeered at. The police kept telling the kids to move on. There

were occasional scuffles that quickly came to nothing.

Steed did the promenade with Bunny Bennett, licking their ice creams, refusing a ride on the Skylark and listening in horror to the machine that spoke their weight. Bennett talked incessantly about his Park Ward body and the passing girls in mini skirts; Steed intruded a few words about the Thrupp & Maberly chassis and Gloria Munday.

"It's owned by the Yanks," said Bennett. "That's the trouble with our precision industries, scratch away the polish and you'll find it's American money. That's how Radio Gloria has survived the bill to get rid of the pirates. It's financed by the Americans."

"For charity?" asked Steed. "Or do they believe in subsidising popular culture?"

"Well,. you know the Yanks," said Bennett cryptically. "They do some funny things."

Steed nodded. "High finance and all that."

They paused outside the fairground where a. mob of youths were posing before some television cameras. There was a ritual movement of pushes and surges, the correct aggressive noises were being made. It would look menacing on the news at five to six but the kids' hearts weren't in it until six policemen suddenly rushed them. Then there was something to photograph.

By some kind of bush telegraph a thousand adolescents reached the spot within minutes and eight grey buses in side turnings emptied out their cargoes of policemen.

"What's happening?" Bunny Bennett asked nervously.

"It's a riot," said Steed. "Several thousand people want to see what's happening, and that's what's happening. It causes riots, which is what everyb6dy wants to see."

"Impose a curfew, that's the answer. I remember in Malaya when Gurney was killed... "

His military reminiscences were drowned by the uproar. So they watched in silence as a lad with blonde hair broke away from the mob. His face was bleeding, and as he stumbled along the pavement three more youngsters from the fringe of the crowd pursued him. He ended up unconscious in the gutter.

"Shouldn't we do something?" asked Bennett. "Like what?"

"Well, the pubs are still open. We could go and have a drink."

It was more like warfare now, with a score of kids on one side of the road moving towards an arbitrary twenty on the other side. They had bottles, iron bars and a couple of knives. They met in the middle amid the traffic and a blur of blue uniforms, and while the battle lasted they were all showered with bricks and

missiles from the audience.

"Tear gas, that's what we would have used in Malaya... "

Somebody had had a similar idea. Not tear gas but pop music. Threading its way through the pitched battles, the day trippers and the newspaper reporters was a lorry. Steed had to grin. It was so ridiculous that it might even work - a frenetic group of four musicians and a singer was creating the biggest diversion ever seen in wartime. "Walking the Dog" seemed to be the name of the song, and it was amplified through equipment placed on every side of the lorry.

"It's the Commotions," shouted Bunny Bennett. "Clever," called Steed. "Like theatres that play the national anthem to get rid of the audience."

The next number seemed to be called "Great Balls of Fire" and apparently everyone knew it. The only violent activity going on was the arresting of nearly a hundred teenagers, but those who weren't being arrested were content to shout, jostle and jig about to the Commotions. The centre of interest had shifted.

But the audience was just as dangerous. Steed knew what was going to happen as soon as a tall, unhealthy looking man in his mid-thirties loped to the microphone and said "Hi there, guys and gals," with an Australian accent. "Ellis Dee, as if you didn't know, bringing you the best of the Commotions with the compliments of Radio Gloria. Hi there!"

"Hi!" they shouted.

"Hi hi hi hi," he chanted.

The group came in behind him, call and response, "Hi hi hi hi." The guitars took over, and then the frantic young man led off with the song. They were rabble rousers, which was all right for the Albert Hall but not quite the answer to a seafront riot. "Hi hi hi hi 1" Crashing chords and deafening drum beats.

"Hi hi hi hi," yelled the kids. And behind the conventional replies were the screams of the girls. Anyone over the age of thirty would find the ritual perplexing. But Steed, who had seen thirty a few years ago, knew as soon as he saw Gloria Munday take her place on the public platform that he had been too sensible about her fears of death. She was going to be killed.

"The Radio Gloria girl herself," shouted Ellis Dee. "Say hi to the kids, Gloria —"

"Before you sing the latest knock-out hit on the REEL label 'I Hate Men.' So now, kids, listen or dance or make love or just yell your little hearts out while Gloria gives you the beatiest ballad of the year!"

"I Hate Men."

A hundred teenagers clambered onto the lorry while Gloria sang her latest hit. They picked her up bodily and ripped off her clothes, they tore out her hair and pulled her limbs about while the police blew whistles to summon assistance. The

Commotions scattered as soon as their amplifiers were smashed and thrown over the side of the lorry. The riot had started again.

Within half a minute the lorry was stripped of everything including sides and the footboard. All the equipment was destroyed and the singers had vanished. Ellis Dee was next to the driver and they were moving out of the melee. The group and Gloria Munday were in the centre of the fight.

"I say, Steed," said Bunny Bennett, "What's the matter?"

Steed looked at the form on the ground, slightly to one side of the trampling feet. "I killed her," he said dully. "I didn't take her seriously."

The police were moving in again in force, the television cameras were turning avidly. It would all be on the news at five to six.

2

“We’re needed, Mrs. Peel”

It was not an ideal morning for a dip in the sea before breakfast. The mid-day sun shone at a low angle across the tinsel amusements and the green-hued sea in a taunting promise of Summer. But it was cold. Steed cut round the north pier, bumping slightly in the water and shivering vicariously for the half dozen swimmers who were risking all in the cause of physical fitness. He was at the wheel of an eight foot motor launch. The only sensible way to enjoy the sea.

He swung round in a perfect arc to avoid a shapely creature who was doing an olympic crawl towards the horizon, and then he cut out the engine to watch her flounder in the wash. Miss Blackpool or even a mermaid, erotic in a translucent purple bikini. Steed picked up his mooring stick as if it were a harpoon and leaned over the side to fish her out of the water.

“Mrs. Peel,” he said when she had slithered athletically on to the bows, “we’re needed.”

“It can’t be so urgent,” she groaned, “that I haven’t even time for a swim.”

Steed tossed her a towel and then while she was drying herself he started the engine. “Can’t have you kicking off with pneumonia before we’ve finished the job, old fish.”

They roared out to sea without further discussion. He could see Emma Peel’s auburn hair blowing in the wind like an advertisement for the fast life and motor oil. Why go in for discussion? A mature appreciation of physical beauty was all that really mattered. A woman, a boat and the early summer sun, as that Persian said, and who needs books or a bottle of wine?

“There are some sandwiches and a brandy flask in the hamper,” said Steed.

“When I saw your photograph in the newspapers with Gloria Munday,” Emma Peel said eventually, “I thought you were managing nicely by yourself.”

“Not really. I picked her up outside Preston -.”

“Quite. I should have guessed that some disaster would overtake her...”

“She was murdered.”

“I’ve always thought how dangerous those frantic scenes could be,” said Emma. “I’m surprised that nobody was torn to pieces before.”

“She was deliberately killed.”

“Like something out of ‘The Golden Bough’. Apparently lots of primitive people destroyed their gods and ate them. It was part of the religion, like Holy Communion today. All men eat the thing they love—”

“Mrs. Peel! You aren’t listening! Gloria Munday was mauled by the crowd, yes, but she died from stab wounds. Somebody used the occasion to commit a premeditated murder.”

“Oh.”

She listened in silence to the rest of Steed’s account of Gloria Munday in flight from death. “She knew, you see, and she was scared. And she came to me for help...” Steed watched the coast disappear behind him. There was something mystical about the vast sea and its undulations, something awesome about the tiny launch tossing on the tidal movements. There were ships steaming along the horizon, scarcely moving to the human eye, fragile toys packed with insignificant people. So a singer was dead, but the world carried on. “She was a very innocent girl.”

“That’s what pop music is all about.”

Steed was conscious of the unreality as their tiny craft approached a rusting cruiser moored arbitrarily in the middle of nowhere. The *S.S. Gloria* was a ghost ship without a destination or a home. This was where it had been left, probably without even an engine. The crew didn’t number a sailor among them. And the captain would be called Wolf Larsen, a paranoid schizophrenic who read Milton while everyone else on board played records. It looked a desolate and deserted hulk, likely to come alive in dense fog.

Steed hooted three times on the klaxon. Almost immediately five men appeared on the deck of the ship. From their shouts it seemed likely they were Dutch technicians and it seemed as if they didn’t meet many women at sea. They threw a rope ladder down and then helped Emma aboard so avidly that she nearly fell in the water.

“Mr. Steed? How nice of you to come so promptly.” A high pitched effeminate voice from the bridge. Steed turned to look up at a chubby man with a schoolgirl complexion. Dressed in a very large pair of shorts and a flowered shirt. “We’re all so distressed - I’m sure you share our grief. Such a delicious girl.” His podgy hand flapped limply at them. “Horace Horton,” he chirped.

Steed shephered Emma away from the crew and up to the captain’s cabin.

“We don’t usually live on the boat like this,” said Horton, “but this weekend was a social event. We were having a party.”

The cabin was luxurious, with a bed, carpets, chaise longue and the kind of ornament that one finds ashore. “I’m afraid I’m not really the nautical type,” he explained with a giggle. “I hate rum and I’m sure I’d fall out of a hammock. But

sit down, have a cigar, and if I appear distracted from time to time it's because of your shattering lady friend. What will you have to drink?"

Steed glanced at his watch and established that it was safely five minutes past one. "Champagne," he said. He had to be careful.

Emma was peering through a glass panel at the end of the room. It gave on to a studio and lounge below deck level. A disc jockey was working frantically at the turntables, tapes and switches. And a small knot of people were killing time in the lounge part, a middle-aged woman in a mini-skirt, Nick Dickinson and a clean young man who was likely to be another D.J.

"I like to keep an eye on people," said Horton. "After all, I do own them."

He pressed a button at the control panel and the cabin was filled with music. "Number seven in the charts this week," a voice intoned before the vocalist began singing. Horton pressed another button and they could hear the conversation in the lounge.

"According to the newspapers he works for M.I.5," Nick Dickinson was saying.

"*Did* work for M.I.5," corrected the clean young man. "I reckon him as a high class night club owner. Did you see that crazy dolly he had in tow? There's nothing to worry about."

"Who's worrying?" asked the woman. "I hope he strings up Horace by his little nuts and uses him for shark bait!"

Horton beamed proudly as he turned off the microphone. "I like to know what's going on, you see. And we're all wondering who you are, Mr. Steed." He waved happily to someone below who had seen him.

"Why so worried?" asked Steed. "I assume you've already been questioned by the police—"

"I'm wondering, Mr. Steed. Not worried. I'm wondering how you met our Gloria and how you became involved the other night. It's one of the mysteries I don't understand about her death."

Steed went over the basic facts again while he sipped the champagne. Difficult to assess because it was cold rather than iced, but the cigar was excellent, like a pre-Castro Havana. He wondered whether they were still sold anywhere. He hadn't really looked. Perhaps next Christmas he'd buy a box.

"My company has thousands of pounds invested in Radio Gloria, you understand, and many thousands more could be lost at the first breath of scandal. You understand why we're worried."

"I'd stick with wondering if I were you," said Steed. "When a man gets to your age he suffers from ulcers when he worries. And whilst we're talking about your stomach, I can recommend a first class tailor—"

“Don’t try to provoke, me, Mr. Steed.” His shrill little voice was icily dangerous. “I invited you on to my boat because you said you wished to talk with me. All right, talk.”

“Well,” said Steed, “I was wondering how this pirate ship was financed. You don’t do commercial advertising and you receive no revenue from the B.B.C. So how does it work?”

“You should listen to the programme.”

Emma folded an elegant calf over a slim ankle and adjusted her towel as if it were a silver stole. “You have those batty religious programmes about God and the evils of communism in young students. You slant the-news-on-the-hour so that *The Times* appears left wing by comparison, and you have all this moral uplift where the commercials used to be. I’d make a pretty confident guess who puts up the money. A few Texan oil millionaires and a lot of old ladies in the Bible belt.”

Horace Horton went a delicate pink when he was angry and he mopped his face with a damp handkerchief. He was angry now. “I don’t like your sense of humour, young lady! This station is a moral force for good, and don’t you ever forget that.”

“Hence,” said Steed, “your telling the teenagers not to riot yesterday...”

“Obviously.”

“You’re a business man, Mr. Horton, you’re neither a force for good nor a very sinister evil. When I talk to you again I hope you’ll remember that. I get awfully bored with cant.”

Steed took Emma by the arm and led her from the cabin. He was smiling complacently to himself, quite oblivious to the shrill protests from the fleshly little man. He always liked to meet an opponent before the battle began. Size him up, shake hands, get the seconds out of the ring and then kick him where it hurt most.

Nick Dickinson was waiting for them by the rope ladder. “Are you going back?” he drawled. “Thought you might give me a lift.”

“Climb in.”

Nick Dickinson sat hunched on the back of the boat all the way to the shore. He asked in a desultory way whether Steed was making an investigation, and Steed said no. “Shame,” said Nick. He tried to light a cigarette but the wind was too much so he threw it into the sea.

“You seem fed up,” said Steed when they reached the beach.

“Ha ha,” he drawled.

They waited while Emma fetched her clothes from a changing booth under the promenade. “Why not come and have a drink? You look as if you could use it.”

“Okay. Thanks.”

Emma returned with a naval jacket in psychodelic blue and white with a cap to match. The holiday makers still turned to stare at her and someone whistled as they went up the hotel steps.

“You know,” Nick said to her when they relaxed in the bar, “you have a very commercial face.”

Before Emma could snap back with a devastating answer Steed intervened. “I suppose you’ll have to find another singer now that Gloria is dead.”

“Not really. I manage a couple of groups. But I suppose so, sooner or later. Poor old Gloria. I found her in some north London dive when it was all Mersey-beat and we made it together. She was a tough little girl; I was bloody ruthless; so we went through it all, her and me. Now I’m a millionaire. I can make people or break people, because we learnt it all. I own a pop empire...”

He was talking to himself, and his voice trailed away in introspection. Steed wondered whether he was going to cry, but that was something Nick hadn’t learned to do. He sipped his large whisky and stared at the ice, rattled it against the glass. “She had somethihg special. You wouldn’t know, but she wasn’t just a product.”

“You’ll find a replacement,” said Steed.

Nick was looking at Emma with automatic calculation, as he always looked at women or singers. “You have a commercial face. Did you ever sing in the bath?”

“She made a demonstration disc,” Steed said quickly, “for Andrew Oldham, but it was one of those times when Andrew Oldham was throwing it all in.”

“Andrew can often recognise what’s staring him in the face,” he said disparagingly. But he removed his dark glasses and looked at Emma again. “Stand up.”

Emma stood up.

Nick Dickinson walked round her slowly, patting her bottom and feeling the width of her hips. “She’s a bit female,” he said to Steed. “All these curves and things. I like the bust, it’s compact and the buttocks are reasonably slender. But she’d never pass as a pretty choir boy. Female, in fact. Look at that face; it knows it all. She’d scare the pants off the spotty adolescents who buy records at Christmas.”

“Is that bad?” Steed asked.

“No. I think we might sell her. If she can sing.” He grabbed Emma’s hand and dragged her across the bar to the rostrum at the end. “What do you know?” he demanded. “Push that plug in over there and use the microphone. Just give me a number.”

Nick Dickinson sat at the piano and tapped his foot while she shrugged to

Steed. “What about ‘When Irish Eyes Are Smiling’?”

“Great,” said Nick. He played the Ray Charles style intro, all blues and gospel, not at all the way her nanny had sung it to her in the bath. But luckily the manager of the hotel broke up the session after eight bars. He told Steed that he would have to leave, this was the second time... So the three of them went back to London that afternoon.

3

“I can make you a star, baby”

I can make you a star, baby. It was a gambit no girl could resist. I’ll make you famous, in the morning. And then, in the sober dawn, he would remember his previous engagements as usual. Nick lived in a fast-moving world. Emma wished she had been given something easier to do, with the B.B.C. perhaps. You can rely on the B.B.C.

The Bentley reached London ten minutes before midnight and they had to listen to Steed’s ritual boasts about reliable performance and old-fashioned British workmanship. “I’d have won, you know, if I hadn’t been stopped by Miss Munday.”

“What would you have won?” Emma asked. “A big pair of leather gauntlets, some goggles and one of those hats with ear flaps?”

“A silver cup.”

“Can you put Nick and me off at Charing Cross?” she intruded. “I want to show him part of swinging London.” After all, this wasn’t fixed by wire-pulling from the top. If she was going to penetrate the pop business it was on her own merits. So she would risk it now. And if she failed, well, it was really a private thing of Steed’s. This wasn’t an official job. “Actually,” she confessed to Nick, “this was swinging London ten years ago when I was eighteen. I doubt if it rates any more.”

“I remember,” said Nick. “Underneath the arches.”

“Flanagan and Allen,” said Steed.

Not quite. Emma wondered whether G.G.’s or Bunjie’s still existed. Was Paul Lincoln still running the Hungry I? And what had happened to the Heaven & Hell? Strange how recent all that had been. How finished it all was now. In ten years you can fall in love and marry, you can become a widow, make a new life for yourself and become an undercover agent. But she still felt like an eighteen year old girl in need, as the police would say, of care and protection. Men were still inclined to look at her twice and then yell for their mothers. Men, like warfare, were a competitive sport and espionage was better than working. Perhaps it all changes on your thirtieth birthday.

Steed dropped them off at Trafalgar Square and went off to put in his eight

hours at Westminster Mews.

"Are you in love with him?" Nick asked as they watched him chug away down Whitehall.

"Of course. His faults are so endearing. I only wish I liked his virtues. Whatever they are."

Nick took her arm and they went down the hill to Mike McGreedy's. They could have found the place by simply following the noise. Along a sleezy passage and into a smoky doorway where they encountered the first pair of bodies. They groped their way down the stairs past more amorous couples into the dimly lit cellar.

Mike McGreedy's dive was the sort of place where you go because everybody goes there until everybody moves on to somewhere else, and then nobody goes to Mike's place any more except hopelessly out-people who buy more than one cup of coffee and listen to the music. Then a few months later the in-crowd return and stay all night, and when they pop out for a breath of something they have a number scrawled on their hands. From the expressions on their faces Emma guessed these were out-people: they looked mildly interested in the world around them and listened when people were talking to them. The in-crowd were cooler than this.

"What are we doing down here?" Nick demanded uneasily. "Are you trying to live or something?"

"I know the lead guitarist," said Emma. "If I must have an audition I'd prefer it here and now."

She waved across the cellar to Mike, a crew-cut and classless graduate in law from Cambridge. He was tolerated by the in-crowd, who were tolerant of most things except last month's style. Then they pushed through a few rhythmic forms in the middle of the floor who were either dancing or making love and waited by the dais for the group to finish.

Hey, that's Nick Dickinson. Do you see who that is? Yea, Nick Dickinson. Look, Shirl. Out-people are liable to ask for your autograph. Nick Dickinson, Nick Dickinson. The group had become very nervous and were playing badly. They thought they might have been discovered at last.

"I don't know why these damned cellars have to distort the sound," Nick grumbled. "Nobody ever adjusts the amplifiers. Do you think they *like* that drum kit in the middle?" He couldn't stand it. While the musicians went from the last eight bars back into the middle eight and round again Nick clambered among the equipment and made some professional adjustments. "It's all a matter of balance," he muttered. The number ended in embarrassed silence.

"You're Peter Whitmarsh," Nick snapped. "I heard of you when. Can we get

this bloody drummer back at the side? Then I want you to relax a bit and give Emma Peel a few simple chords while she sings. Just come on nicely. You know? I mean, don't be so desperate."

"He's going to make me a star," Emma laughed. But poor old Peter was too impressed to be friendly. And the whole thing was beginning to communicate to Emma. She was becoming anxious to please the twenty-four year old tycoon. And then to her horror Mike McGreedy took the microphone and made with the Tony Hall bit.

"Fantastic new personality on the disc scene, boys and girls, with a new knock-out sound. Singing that good old oldy 'Your Cheating Heart' - yes, it's the sensational Emma Peel!"

"I like Soho at four in the morning," said Nick Dickinson. Their footsteps were clattering on the damp pavements, past the neon windows and the empty cinemas. A few all-nighters were still exuding noise and synthetic high spirits. The lights were still on up there in an attic; maybe someone had answered an advertisement for French lessons. No gang fights in the streets tonight, and money was passing on the turn of a card all over London. "This is the only place I feel I belong," he said.

"That's sad."

Nick put his arm round her shoulders, enveloping Emma in the safe embrace of a man's world. "I'm glad you can sing," he murmured. "It makes my job easier."

Didn't he know how glad *she* was?

"Oh yea, we could have put you across on the sound gimmick, for two records. One big one and a smaller follow up, and then out. Because it's a business, like advertising. But eventually you have to be selling a good product..."

Emma hoped she was saying yes in the right places and wondered why Nick had taken her on. He was a tycoon who knew his business completely.

Their footsteps echoed through the empty streets, the strangers in a tourists' world of commercialised High Life. Arm in arm, like lovers. The tycoon at four in the morning wanting to belong and Emma Peel in a state of nervous exhaustion. That was when it began to rain.

"Your Cheating Heart" was a rabble-rouser, especially with Nick Dickinson sitting in on the piano (to give her confidence doing a Jerry Lee Lewis). The debs loved it and their carefully picked delights loved Emma, so the evening had all the makings of a double-barrelled rave-up. This was one of the things that

still surprised Emma - the underlying violence of the teen-scene; perhaps the music *was* an outlet for frustration, but she wished Ellis Dee wouldn't so deliberately keep the audience in a frenzy. He was asking for trouble!

"Thank you all you debs and bucks, that was Emma Peel and the Four Oranges. We're hotting up the tempo with the next number..." He murmured into the microphone as if it were a woman, caressing with patent insincerity and making the audience love him. "...so I want you to scream or shout, dance if you like or just join in and sing. It's that good old standard: 'Boom Boom Boom'. All right, Emma, hit me now!"

She enjoyed the noise and the emotional rapport with the audience. The music created the tension and Emma's job was to harness it to herself, which was easy by the time they'd all been shouting Boom Boom Boom for three minutes. "Just one more time!" she called, and they did it again. Her pleasant soprano voice had a bar-room bounce to it when she let rip and her manner was arrogant enough to set her above the audience. She had them yelling by the interval.

"It's the mauve trouser suit that does it," said Ellis when he came into her dressing room. A relief group from Eton College had taken over and they had half an hour. "The Celias and the Fionas all went to boarding school and they think you're somebody's brother."

He had been hostile to Emma since he came off the boat for his week ashore. But she couldn't provoke him into giving anything away. Ellis didn't rattle easily. He draped his legs over a chair and lit a cigarette. "One of them - a Virginia, I think - just told me she never sleeps with the same man twice in case he starts getting serious. I told her I feel the same way about riding horses." He laughed mysteriously.

"I'm not surprised that some people hold you responsible for Gloria Munday's death," Emma said icily. "You deliberately play on people's aggression."

He called her Honey Child in that unreachable drawl. "If I play on their aggression it's because that rings up the Sale notice. What do you want, I should tell them about my grey-haired old mother? Those hooray loving fun-people have mothers of their own with blue rinse hair-dos and they hate them! I'll tell you something, honey child. I liked Gloria Munday."

"You drummed up the riot in which she was murdered."

"Yes." He had a weather-beaten face and he was rangy, like John Wayne or Gary Cooper. That was why everything about him was so slow and calculated. "Do you think you've been sent by God to make me repent, or are you my conscience? There you go, baby, the saint look again. I'm looking forward to the day you cry, the time you find out just what this romantic world of song is all about. Then maybe you'll ask me for help, and I'll be able to laugh."

"Like you laughed at Gloria."

He smiled at a private joke and then explained it to her. "I slept with her the night before she died. She was so scared I took her into my bed and watched over her while she slept. As I mentioned, I liked the girl. I promised her that when she went along the promenade at Blackpool I'd be right beside her. Yep, and that's where I was."

"So who killed her?"

"Are you a cop or a pop singer?"

Ellis Dee had said what he'd come in to say, so he unfurled himself from the chair and loped out of the room. He left Emma feeling dissatisfied. These damned D.J.s had to be cynical bums on the periphery of big business, men with no conspicuous talent apart from charm. And yet... Ellis Dee was cynical, charming, and underneath it probably a nice bloke. She was to find that nearly all the D.J.s were probably nice blokes. And that was confusing. They were bums.

Emma went back into the hotel lounge to get a drink. If this was what happened before the season was started she dreaded to think... Either Nick would have to get her on to the ballroom circuit or Steed would have to become a concert baritone and do his own dirty work. She ordered a Remy Martin and silently toasted Steed's doom.

How much do you think this little spree will cost her mother, someone was asking. Not enough. If mummy spent *ten* thousand pounds our Caroline would still be a virgin at the end of the season. But Caroline claims - Nonsense, that happened while she was playing a vigorous game of hockey.

Have you seen Rodney? How? In his... Oh God. Emma clutched her brandy and went across to the veranda. They were going to crack that bearskin joke. Was I, she asked herself, like this at eighteen? Perhaps, but a damned sight more attractive. And more witty! She used to crack jokes about Sir Anthony Eden; they weren't funny, but that's satire!

"Well well, it's Mrs. Peel, incognito. I didn't realise my daughter knew you. Wasn't your father in boats or something? How nice of you to come. I always say that people with position should mix more with people who have money, it could be such a useful alliance."

"Like brains and beauty," said Emma.

"I heard you were employed now," Lady Forbes-Benson ploughed on regally. "In the police or something."

"I'm a singer."

"How clever. A woman can get away with these things so much easier than a policeman, because their feet don't show them up. And you can always

recognise a policeman by the way he says ’ello ’ello ’ello. By the way, do you have the time on you?”

Lady Forbes-Benson would have been a virgin at the end of her life if she hadn’t got Lord Arthur tanked up at one of these Queen Charlotte hops and then raped him. He took to drink the morning after. But it was too late. “I’m a singer,” said Emma. “But please deliver the message before you hand round the cucumber sandwiches.”

“Message?” She breathed conspicuously and then swung her bosom round at Emma. “I don’t know what you mean, young lady, but I’d advise you to sing. Sing your little heart out. If that girl Munday had spent more time singing she might be alive today.”

Lady Forbes-Benson hauled on her rudder, full steam aport, and breasted the sea of fun-people. Emma remained tossing about in the wake, sipping the last of the brandy, feeling that she had been set up. Trust Steed! He had presumably found nothing illegal by conventional enquiries, so he was trying to push the Horace Horton team into a false move against Emma. Carry on Steed. One of these days I’ll rescue you in the nick of time, if you’re lucky, from a plight I’ve created myself. You sod.

“What the hell did you say to Lady F. Off?”

“Nothing,” said Emma.

Nick was in his scratching and sniffing mood. Like I mean, babe, move it, twitch twitch. He got like that when he was working. Or thinking. “You have to be nice to the old bag. She’s a power behind the seat of the pants. On the board. You know. What was the matter with her?”

“She accused me of being a policeman.”

“Yea, that was all we needed. Emma Peel, darling, you sing like a professional now. For God’s sake act like a bloody professional! Offer the old cow your autograph and tell her your biggest ambition is to meet Aaron Hammett. Don’t try to be clever. Are you looking forward to meeting Aaron Hammett? Because he’s coming over to England next month and they’re all looking forward to meeting... For half an hour I sit at that piano and what happens? You upset Ellis Dee and then have a row with Lady F.O. Just relax, Emma, darling, and let me put you across. Just leave it to me.”

Emma waved to a waiter and ordered another brandy.

“Why should I let you put me across with idiots who think I’m a policeman?”

“Because, my darling, you’re a bloody policeman. That’s why I’m making you a star. So leave it to me, yes?”

“Yes.” She agreed, crushed. “I’m sorry.”

“That’s all right. If you ever want to retire I’ll make you into a great singer.”

4

“John Steed, you’re remanded in custody”

B.E.I. was the other major electronics company in Britain, and Steed read about their troubles over a hearty breakfast. “Seven factories brought to halt by wildcat strikes!” He always propped up his *Daily Telegraph* on the percolator and tried to reach the crossword by his third cup of black coffee, and his first panatella. But this morning he was still brooding over the 2,000 men who had unanimously voted to strike until the Minister of Aviation apologised to them.

“Following three recent air crashes that were caused, according to the results of official investigations, by faulty workmanship on the factory floor, use of the B.E.I. auto-pilot has been suspended, and now the men have decided they are insulted.”

A taxi drew up in the mews outside and honked its hooter. Steed shook his head. There were no quiet streets left in London. Taxis! If only taxi drivers would go on strike whenever they were insulted... Steed leaned out of the living room window to see who the driver was hooting at.

“Mr. Steed? Good morning, sir. Your cab as requested.”

“I didn’t request...” Oh lord, it was Benson. “I’ll be half an hour yet! You’d better come up and wait.” He threw the door key to Benson and then went into his bedroom to dress.

“Do you normally get people out of bed like this?” he demanded fifteen minutes later. He’d shaved and composed his mind for the day’s distractions. He poured himself a fourth cup of black coffee.

“It’s a quarter to twelve,” said Benson with that morally superior air of a man who caught the workman’s train to London at 7.30 a.m.

“I didn’t get to bed until four,” Steed snapped.

“Ah well, guv, we don’t all mix in show-business circles. If I was gadding about with famous film stars I’d stay up all night as well. It’s all glamour and the thrill of constant danger—”

“Go back and wait in the cab!”

“I’ve come to take you for a mystery ride,” he said to an imaginary, just audience. “Mr. Steed will be having a secret rendyvous in an exotic west end club with His Nibs himself—”

"Shut up."

"Rely on me, Mr. S. If it's Sophia Loren in the bedroom there—"

"Sophia Loren's married."

"Ho ho ho."

As they drove through St. James's Park, Steed asked the man whether he was in touch. As a major speaking to his R.S.M. "To be honest, Benson, I don't understand the strike at B.E.I. It's the kind of thing we used to dismiss as communist-inspired. But it seems to have happened so quickly that nobody could have organised it. And the shop steward behind it is not a communist. Fellow called Adam Fleming, who has a long record of co-operation with the employers and support for productivity schemes. Why have the men come out on strike?

"I don't know," said Benson.

So much for grass root wisdom and the man on the top of a Clapham omnibus. These myths are so vulnerable. "Where are we going?" Steed asked.

"The Salad Bowl," said Benson. "It's this week's big discovery with His Nibs. For six and sixpence you have all the lettuce you can eat, with radishes and spring onions - as much as you want. Sort of place that a rabbit would give his bobbed tail to get into."

Steed stopped off on the way to fill up the brandy flask in his umbrella handle. He knew the old man in places like the Salad Bowl; you either drank carrot juice or swigged illicit hooch when he wasn't looking. He felt slightly fortified as he sat at the corner table next to the square set military man with the iron grey hair.

"I've been reading about you in the papers," said the military man. "You seem to have joined Mary Quant and that fellow Frost as symbols of the new Britain. No, no, don't attempt to deny it. I'm glad. It shows you still have a certain flair for your job." He chuckled knowingly. "It wasn't until I saw what you were up to that I realised what was going on. Damned clever of you to catch on so quickly. First class, Steed. Carry on!" He beamed avuncularly.

"Thank you, sir."

Steed waited to find out what he had been so clever about.

"Where do you think, sir, I should go from here?"

"Onward, Steed, onward." The old man passed him the menu and suggested a sea food stew. "If you hadn't been so smart I don't think I'd ever have seen the connection between the death of Gloria Whosit and the B.E.I. trouble. I'd been looking into those crashes and getting nowhere."

"Oh well, you know how it is," Steed said blankly.

"You see, I'd been looking for a reasonable explanation, such as money or politics, and I was looking for rational behaviour. I said to myself, *why* did those

strikers strike, and *why* did those teenagers riot at Blackpool? Why did the Kirkham voters elect Spike Shaw? As I've often said, a military training is only misleading in this modern world." He sipped his herbal aperitif and frowned briefly. "By the way, Steed, I'm wondering about that assistant of yours. Has she gone off the rails? I hear she's been singing. At the Dorchester."

"Infiltration, sir. With any luck she'll follow the same paths as Gloria Munday..."

"And get killed, eh? Well, that would stop her singing. I heard rumours that one of those horse-traders had been pushing at M.I.5 to have Mrs. Peel sent abroad or something. Does the name Benson & Hedges mean anything to you?"

"They make cigarettes—"

"The woman put her daugher on to the market this season, and she seems to have influence. Some pretty important people are involved in this little game. Be careful, Steed. For God's sake don't you start singing."

"Good lord no, sir." Steed coughed over his celery cocktail. "I'm afraid I ought to be going, sir. I had planned to catch the two thirty-five from King's Cross."

The old man agreed instantly. "Have one of those rich meals on the train, Steed. It may be unhealthy, but that's part of the price you pay for being a trend-setter. I only hope you clear up the case quickly, before all the food and vintage wines ruin your brain cells."

Steed sat in the train and sipped his brandy while he worried about the interview. His Nibs, as Benson insisted on calling the man, was astute. Clever. He had given Steed no instructions apart from vague encouragement, and he had ended on a warning note; in fact, Steed was on his own. If he succeeded, then well done, and if he failed it was a private mistake. He would have to tell Mrs. Peel that speed was required.

A thin man in a raincoat had followed Steed to the station. Now he was on the train. Forty-five, balding on top and obviously anxious to please. Not so much an international spy, more a man with a family to support. But he was carrying a gun and he was waiting in the next carriage. Steed went and stood in the corridor to make the man nervous.

The midlands, or the north, whichever, was a foreign, flat land that radiated the pride of men who came after the industrial revolution. It was not conventionally beautiful, because it was so unnatural, but it was impressive. Those smoking chimneys and the rows of D.H. Lawrence terrace houses, the man-made hills and the slag heaps that glowed in the night, they were monstrosities that had been blessed by time. Like canals and railways, they were old and out of date; better than concrete motorways, better than twenty-storey

motels.

"Do you realise that people live in those houses?" Steed asked the thin man in the raincoat. "Human beings like ourselves. Approximately. Well, people like you. You don't mind if I join you? There's nothing like human company, after its own fashion."

"Er - no," said the man. He crossed his legs and pressed against the wall of the compartment. Steed would have bet money that his name was Price. Divorce work undertaken, standing in the rain under lamp posts a speciality. Not much occasion for using guns.

"I was talking to a man on the top of a Clapham omnibus only this morning, asking him about strikes and that sort of thing, trying to find out where we were going. And do you know what he said?"

Mr. Price fidgeted again and put his hand in his pocket. "Clapham," he suggested.

"He said he didn't know. Isn't that extraordinary? Tell me about strikes and things. Did you vote for Spike Shaw yesterday? A rhetorical question; just tell me why you voted for Spike Shaw."

"I didn't vote for anybody—"

"Don't quibble about words, man. It said in my paper that the ordinary voter was behind Shaw—"

"I don't know what you're talking about."

Steed waved impatiently towards the back-to-backs out of the window, the endless interchangeable houses on the outskirts of a city. It was any city, they all look the same from British Railways and you always come out of much the same station into much the same street. "I'm talking about all those people listening to Radio Gloria on their transistor radios. Don't tell me you haven't an ordinary wife who does her washing on Mondays and gets that Monday morning feeling. What hair cream do you use?"

"I'll pull the communication cord—"

"My dear Mr. Price—"

"The name is Smith. Arthur Smith."

"My dear Mr. Smith, why pretend that you know absolutely nothing about Radio Gloria? Why can't you tell me what's behind the strike at B.E.I.?"

"You're mad, do you know that?"

Steed smiled amiably and put his hand in his inside pocket for the cigar case. That was too much for Mr. Price, alias Smith, who drew his gun and said drop it. But Steed merely raised an eyebrow and took out a panatella. "Do you have a light?" he asked.

"No."

Steed shrugged and then went systematically through all his pockets. By the time he produced his lighter, like a conjuror from his fob pocket, Price or Smith was ready to shoot anybody. “I always find that a panatella soothes the nerves.”

“Shut up.”

“Poor Mr. Price. You aren’t earning your keep on this job, you know. They asked you to follow me, not kill me.” He shook his head, sad. “Didn’t they tell you what this was all about? I’m not a seedy husband sneaking off for a night with my mistress, and I’m not someone who’s bought a fridge on the H.P. that I can’t afford to pay for. The name is John Steed, and I’m slightly offended. They should have employed a man in my own class. You’re an affront, Mr. Price—”

“Smith.”

“Impossible.”

The train whistled shrilly and then they were in darkness. The tunnel echoed and emphasised the noise of the train so that Steed could scarcely hear the panic-stricken Smith threshing about in the carriage. It sounded as if he were fighting a pack of tigers. But when they broke into daylight again Steed found the poor fellow standing in the middle, hitting out in all directions with the butt of the gun. Steed himself was sitting in the corner where Smith had been.

“I hope you know how to fire that thing,” he said nervously. “I’d hate to be shot by mistake.”

“What do you want from me?” asked Smith.

“Nothing. *You* were following *me*.”

Smith was still waving the gun dangerously as he sank into the other corner seat. His eyelids blinked more quickly than Steed cared to count and he kept on looking into the corridor, out of the window, in a vain prayer that someone would get him out of this mess.

“Can I offer you a drink? A small brandy relieves the monotony of these long journeys.” Steed removed the handle of his umbrella and took a swig. There was no bouquet, of course, but you can’t have everything in a brolly. He smiled, flicked the handle back in place and pressed the switch-blade. Mr. Price had screamed before he knew why and the gun had clattered to the floor.

“You’ve cut my wrist!”

“A flesh wound, nothing more,” Steed said as he picked up the gun. “I don’t like dangerous weapons.” He threw the gun out of the window.

“Help!” Mr. Price had leaped at the communications cord, and the train was screeching to a halt by the time Steed had pacified the fellow. “You tried to kill me!”

“Don’t be silly. A man with your temperament shouldn’t be doing this kind of work. And I bet you won’t have the twenty-five pounds to pay the fine...”

Steed had watched the familiar Mr. Price given time to pay before his own case came up. He was being charged with assault but the police were on to something. They had been tipped off that the assault tied in with a larger issue.

"John Steed," said the magistrate, "you are remanded in custody, for one week so that the police may complete their enquiries into the death of Miss Gloria Munday."

"Your honour—"

"Come on," the policeman muttered, "that's all."

They took him back down to the cells beneath the court.

H.M. Prison, Kirkham, Lancs. was the same as all those prisons built in the early nineteenth century: massive, grey and reverberating. The door clanged hollowly behind the seven new prisoners in one of the most doom-laden sounds that Steed had ever heard. There was also something unpleasant in watching the senior officer sign for their bodies.

He waited for unknown hours in a reception cell, then had a bath in four inches of warm water, and then went back to his cell. A man with a red band on his arm brought a plastic tray of food, then Steed waited again. After five or six hours Horace Horton and his machinations became remote, so remote as to be unreal. The only reality was this reverberating steel world and the cursing prisoners who helped to run it, that and an outraged determination to make Horton pay for this humiliation. But Horace Horton belonged to a different world. A reasonable world where you make decisions and behave humanely, where even murder makes more sense than life in gaol.

Steed wasn't the prisoner type. Neither was a terrified adolescent who had been remanded pending the psychiatrist's report: he had exposed himself to three schoolgirls in a park, which gave rise to the obvious witticisms when they went for their medical examinations. "All right, where is it then?" They soon had the kid in tears, which proved that he was not only despicable but unmanly as well.

"Whose side are you on?" Steed asked the fat "trusty" who was asking for a precise description of the girls.

"I got a daughter, mate, and I'll show you what I do to bastards like this one."

"I'm sure your daughter appreciates the fatherly concern."

The man swung a wild right at Steed and then picked up a medicine bottle. He was strong, but he wasn't clever, and Steed practised his reverse bent arm lock. It always surprised him when these little tricks worked and he felt rather pleased at the sight of the trusty lying on his back. There are no sides in prison.

"Smash his face!" "Go on, put. the boot in!" "Cripple him!"

The medical examination consisted of shining a light on the prisoner's genitals and then examining his behind. They were all declared fit. Steed wondered which of the spectators was the doctor. And what the warder thought his job was. The prisoner type is someone who had been in prison for more than two days.

"What are you in for?" asked a Glaswegian admiringly.

"Nothing," said Steed. "How about you?"

"I was standing on a street corner. They called it burglary."

The other five newcomers laughed. They were all innocent in gaol. And Steed quickly learned that the friendly question was "How long?" and not "What for?" People are not damned fellows, they are bastards. There is only one adjective, one adverb, and the really coherent man is he who can use it four times in a six word sentence. (It's the subject and the verb that present the problem.) How better to express their total humiliation?

The remand prisoners were in D Block, and Steed finished his first day in gaol sitting in cell 27. He had no idea what time it was, but it was still daylight outside. By standing on the scrubbed wooden chair he could see out of the window. There were about twenty prisoners in the yard, kicking a ball about and laughing at a couple of super-camp queens. Somewhere in the block a Welsh tenor was singing his way through the repertoire of end-of-the-pier arias. Singing them rather well, but the disembodied voice was more haunting than reassuring. Just as the sight of real houses in the distance, and once the glimpse of a real person, emphasised Steed's isolation.

"I demand the rights accorded to an officer," Steed said to the walls of his cell, "under section whichever of the Geneva Convention!"

The walls didn't answer. There was a radio on somewhere, loud and distorted by the open air; it belonged to the world out there. Steed made up his bed and then sat staring through the window at a narrow strip of cloudy sky. There was nothing to read in the cell except the Prison Regulations. He listened to the radio, heard the noise of the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, Emma Peel. By the end of the second evening Steed was finding this radio essential. It was Radio Gloria, he realised. Ellis Dee had a grotesque fascination (was he real?) and the religious half hours were a revelation. Not at all the protestant homilies Steed was accustomed to from Dr. Chasuble.

"This is Herbert W. Sinclair speaking to you from the Church of Christ in California." As if he was selling quack remedies for the gripe, but in fact his remedy was for old age, despair, fear of illness, communism and students. "It's the same in England, it's the same all over the world, it's the so-called educated people, the students at the universities on other people's money who are spreading scepticism. Instead of learning to take over the world leadership for

freedom and Jesus Christ these students are opposing, laughing and mocking, creating a vacuum for the reds to fill. Have you seen them? You can recognise them on sight by the beards and the way they dress...”

There wasn’t anything else to do except listen. Steed found that the most soul destroying aspect of prison life was the empty boredom. So he listened to Herbert W. Sinclair’s instruction that these bearded antiChrists should be seized and washed, cleansed of scepticism in the blood of the lamb or in the nearest fountain. Couldn’t they, Steed wondered, get Radio Gloria for incitement to riot?

“In two weeks time I shall be coming to England for the first crusade since 1950, and I want all you Christians over there to rally behind me. We need an army for Jesus. Not a boy scout movement or a boys’ brigade because times have changed and it isn’t the empire we’re bothered with now...”

Well, Billy Graham had been and gone a few times and no harm was done. Steed lay down on the top of the bed and thanked God that they were playing some more records now. Records were easier to ignore than speech. He wondered whether Sinclair would get his army. The appeal was too crude to take seriously, but Spike Shaw’s appeal had been laughable until he had been elected. And who would have guessed that those workers would still be on strike? Why did the teenagers riot at Blackpool?

Steed smiled to himself. In some ways Spike Shaw could do a power of good in Westminster. A pity it wasn’t Spike Milligan. Once they start televising parliament the whole situation will change, and electing Shaw is at least a beginning. Not a bad fellow either, apart from his politics.

Rubbish! What am I thinking?

Steed suddenly leaped off the bed. “Let me out!” He banged on the steel door in his excitement, but he knew that no-one would come. He would have to escape. He would have to escape damned quickly if he was to prevent the most meaningless revolution in history. Because it would also be the most destructive civil war, and there was only one way to stop it.

5

Emma is number five in the charts

"Something happened to Gloria while we were recording in Memphis. I don't know what it was, but it upset her. From then on she knew they were going to kill her."

"Who were they?"

Nick smiled nervously. "The same gang as we're spending the weekend with."

"So," said Emma, "we might have some excitement."

The lights of Blackpool were visible four miles away, low on the horizon like a yellow strip through the middle of a black universe; black sea and black sky squeezing the life out of a poor town. The S.S. *Gloria* was lifting gently on the waves so that Emma realised just how small a 750 ton minesweeper is in the eyes of nature. But it was making a lot of noise behind them, the loudspeakers were loyally transmitting the F.J. Show from the downstairs studio and they could hear the good time shrieks of the Rhythm Girls, the manly laughter of the men. Everyone was having a ball.

"When men are set on enjoying themselves," Emma said, pausing at the top of the stairs to contemplate the swinging scene, "they get in a few crates of whisky and a supply of women... I'd rather read an improving book."

The chubby man in the flapping white suit held his hand out to her as she descended the stairs. "I shall make it my mission," he piped, "to amuse you. There are some deliciously exotic twists laid on for the evening, and in my cabin I have the complete works of Dostoievsky. Do you know Dr. Sinclair?"

"Hi," said Dr. Sinclair. "Great to meet you. Ha ha ha."

Emma shook hands with the improbable clergyman. Firm, manly grip. Ha ha ha. He resembled a rugby international trying to pass as Ronald Reagan. "My favourite singer," he said. "Ha ha ha." Emma wasn't sufficiently attuned to guess which of the southern American states he came from.

"And this is Mr. Silberbaum," chirped Horace Horton. "He's from New York."

Complete with huge cigar and pebble glasses. He stared short-sightedly at Emma's purple art nouveau chiffon cocktail shift. He took off his glasses and wiped them. "I suppose those are Bermuda shorts underneath?" he asked thickly. "I have to be careful, you know. My heart."

“Ha ha ha. Great to be in your country—” Sinclair’s good natured laugh was clearly articulated, as if the words meant something spelled H.A. three times.

“Mr. Silberbaum is President of REEL, U.S.A. He always likes to meet our big money spinners.” Horton patted Emma proudly on the bottom. “Emma is number five in the British charts this week. She could be the biggest thing Nick has found since Gloria Munday.”

“God rest her soul,” added Sinclair. Ha ha ha.

“I hope he hasn’t made a mistake this time.” Silberbaum peered at her malevolently. “Are you with us?” he snapped.

“She’s easy,” Nick interrupted quickly, “but she doesn’t know any more than I do what the hell’s going on. We talked about this before and I warned you—”

“Trouble, Nick,” Horace Horton purred, “you’re making trouble again.”

Emma let the men argue the point while she collected a campari from the bar and then went over to Ellis Dee and the girls. “Hello, Ellis. Nice time?” She sat beside him on the sofa. “I suppose the party warms up towards midnight?”

“Maybe. These things aren’t my style—”

“Oh. I thought you’d played this scene before.”

“I’ll be glad when Horton stops treating this boat as his private hotel and lets us get on with our work. We’re a broadcasting station, though you wouldn’t guess it. Look at Freddie James in the studio; he isn’t working from a proper script and that last Eartha Kitt record was really Frank Sinatra played at the wrong speed. It’s too bloody unprofessional.”

The Four Rhythm Girls were sitting around aimlessly, ready with the bright smiles and the instant-jollity required of them. It was a hard life. I was at a party last week with... and do you know!... He didn’t! So I said to him, I said... Really, just because they’re famous! Well, I wouldn’t mind with... Have you tried the new green lipstick? Yes, the one with the funny advertisements. I bought some of that brown body make-up and I’ve never had a chance to use it. Chicken! So they all four vanished into what they described as the Little Girls’ room to experiment with brown body make-up. After all, darling, it’ll make the evening!

They missed the star arrival of the evening. Horton had been padding up and down, looking out frequently to the heavens, and suddenly he called from the top of the stairs, “Here she comes!” The swishing noise in the sky was a helicopter after all. Silberbaum and Sinclair hurried on to the deck to form a reception committee.

“What happens now?” asked Emma.

“You’ll meet the legendary Sandra Heatherington,” Ellis Dee explained. “Female tycoon and electronic wizard. Or should I say witch?”

Sandra Heatherington slid from the cockpit and climbed rapidly down the

thirty-foot rope ladder to the deck. Emma felt some applause was required. The woman was slim, elegant, a youthful forty perhaps in a black trouser suit that made her look like Greta Garbo. Even the brief-case contributed to the style.

She swept into the lounge with a general announcement that she couldn't keep Elija waiting up there for long and darlings to everyone how delightful again. "Emma Peel? Darling, I've been waiting to meet you. Nick, you've built up a super image for this girl. Horace! Read this and give me your impressions while I wrestle with a stiff martini."

Four stewards had appeared from the crew quarters; one took her brief-case while another hurried to mix her a martini. "Emma, you must come and have supper with me next time you hit London. We can have an orgy or something. Thank you, Alfred." She sipped the martini gratefully. "Helicopters are such flimsy things: I kept debating whether it would be better to crash on dry land or drown in the sea. Hurry up, Horace, we're cutting that record next week."

Horton gave an abject smile and took her arm. "Marvellous, Sandra. This ought to do the trick. But I'm wondering whether it isn't a little complex..." He beckoned secretively to Silberbaum. "Shall we take a turn round the deck and talk about it? So many distractions down here."

Emma watched them leave the lounge. "Do they always have a director's conference before a record is cut?" she asked Nick.

"They've been doing it recently," he mumbled. "I don't know why, because they never change the words or music. They just enjoy talking I suppose."

It was time for a little freshening up. Emma went through into the ladies' lavatory; it was on deck level and she should be able to locate the conspirators through the port hole. But Emma found the place crowded with naked brown limbs and girlish laughter. Like the dormitory after lights out. "Don't you want to meet Miss Whosit before she flies away?" They didn't. Sandra! She was so high and mighty.

Emma had to be blatant and go on deck for a breath of fresh air. There was no conceivable excuse unless she was checking on the plimsoll line. She saw them leaning against the lifeboat. Horton and Silberbaum whispering furtively and the woman declaiming for all to hear. "But darlings, you forget that a pop record is listened to again and again, repeated *ad nauseum* until every sound is carved in the delinquent mind. That's why you can make it complex."

Silberbaum waved his cigar through the darkness and he seemed to be frightened of risk.

"It isn't risk, it's science. You could put the logarithmic tables on a record and by the time it reached number one this would be the most mathematical country in the world."

She won the argument. Silhouettes shaking hands and a moment later she was shinning back up the rope ladder with the brief-case under her arm. Emma watched the helicopter swing like a prehistoric bird towards the coast before she slipped back into the lounge.

"Emma! Come up to my cabin," Horace Horton called. "We must have a chat."

Silberbaum passed her on the stairs without looking at her.

"I thought I saw you a moment ago, but I must have been mistaken." Horton took her by the arm, which was unpleasant. Emma found him irrationally repulsive, although she didn't as yet know why. He made her squirm. There were perspiration patches under the arms of his white suit, but it was more than that. More than his squeaky voice or his Manchester accent.

"I meant to have a talk with you before, Emma, just in case you are a spy. Spies are severely dealt with in this organisation. The fellow you came here with in the first place, for instance." Horton ushered her into his cabin with a jocular pinch. "Steed I believe his name was. He's now in gaol."

"Oh." How the devil was she supposed to react? "I don't know Steed awfully well. But you can be sure that whatever he's in for - he didn't do it."

Horton laughed shrilly. "Oh yes. I'm sure of that!" His laughter was even more nerve-racking than Herbert W. Sinclair's. "But there's no justice on this earth, is there?"

"Do these spies spy for anyone in particular, or is the word spy a generic name for people you imagine to be under your bed at night?"

"Spies are people I find lurking in corners when important discussions are going on, people I have reason to distrust." He smiled. "But as I said, I trust you, Emma."

Emma realised there was a woman on Horton's bed.

Fully dressed but ill-looking, and she was leaning on one elbow waiting terrified for something to happen. "I'll go, Horace," she stammered.

"You drunken bitch, what are you doing in here?"

"Don't hit me! Please don't hit me!"

Horton grinned with boyish pride at Emma. "She drinks, my secretary, passes out all over the place. Get out, you bitch!" She fled like a dog until Horton's commanding voice halted her. "Come here!" She crawled obediently back into the room. "Isn't she an attractive secretary?" he asked Emma.

She had been. But she was nearly thirty and the life was gone. Her raven black hair was streaked with grey, her figure had withered from whisky and neglect and the face was drawn. The bone structure was still there but the hollow eyes were all you really saw, signalling fear until Horton spoke again.

“Pour Emma and me a drink, Miss Simpson. A babycham for me.” He raised an eyebrow to Emma before ordering another campari. “And if you must have a double whisky...”

“Yes, Horace.”

“You wouldn’t believe she was Miss Blackpool nearly ten years ago, would you?”

“I can believe it,” Emma murmured. “Thank you, Miss Simpson.”

“Now drink that quickly, Miss Simpson, good, and then *get out*!”

Miss Simpson fled. Horton went across to his window into the lounge and watched her arrive the other side. “She was a perfect creature when I met her. She had everything a woman could have!” He watched in satisfaction as she staggered down the stairs, and when she fell the last three steps he laughed agreeably. “But she never cries. You wouldn’t believe that, would you, but by God she never cries. Not any more.”

“You evil little man,” Emma sighed.

“You wouldn’t understand. I didn’t destroy her for fun, please don’t think that. I destroyed her to be revenged. Truly, it was only gradually that I learned to enjoy humiliating people, and I’ve had to practise hard! I obtained pleasure from terrifying Gloria Munday, it gave me a delicious thrill to watch her fear. Did you know that a young girl’s fear has a physical smell to it? But at one time I wouldn’t have appreciated the spectacle in the least.”

“I was much the same when I was a girl,” said Emma, “only with me it was playing mothers and fathers.”

“I used to be the self-pitying type instead. I hated everybody, you know, I resented all the normal happy people who had ruined my life, who had laughed at me... “

One of those, thought Emma, one of the ten million men who thinks that a woman is an invitation to listen with mother, as if psychiatrists had never been invented. She preferred her men to be strong and reasonably silent. Was this his little talk about spies? He had lured her to his cabin on false pretences. And while he was pouring out his little soul he pressed a button that made an oak panel in the wall slide back. Behind the panel was a full-length sheet of glass, and the Rhythm Girls were the other side, posing, peering and rubbing make-up over each other’s bodies.

“That’s a two-way mirror,” Horton explained. “Aren’t they exciting girls? So relaxed in the way they use their limbs, and look at those rippling muscles. The brown cosmetic catches the light superbly. If only the red-head didn’t shave herself.... Where was I? Yes, for years I hated girls like that, I was jealous of their lithe, healthy vitality. But now I’ve won through.”

“Bully for you! And what did you want with me? I thought I was meant to be a spy.”

“Not really. I wanted to say that Gloria spurned Mr. Silberbaum’s ideas when she heard about them, in Memphis. She behaved quite badly. And—” laughing - “look what happened to her.” He broke off in fascination because one of the girls had accidentally bobbed the red-head in the eye and this appealed to their sense of humour. Horton himself chuckled appreciatively. “That’s a tantalising scar on the small one’s right breast,” he added.

“What are Mr. Silberbaum’s ideas? I find this room of yours - and you, I’m afraid, a bit much. Just tell me how to behave well and then I’ll go downstairs to join Nick.”

Horton glared at her. “You’re getting above yourself, Emma. By the time you leave this boat I’ll have tamed you, but let’s make it easy. Ask me what Mr. Silberbaum has been working on at REEL, U.S.A., and I’ll tell you. Don’t make things difficult.”

“All right,” she laughed, “give me another drink and I’ll treat you with all due respect.” She helped herself to the campari. “What has Mr. Silberbaum been working on at REEL, U.S.A.?” It was an effective tipple and she found it even more of an effort to say the right thing to him.

“Subliminal sound!” Horace Horton announced dramatically.

“Bully for you.”

“Quite. Subliminal sound is a message that lies beneath the level of consciousness, and it communicates to the listener without his realising. It’s like advertising rather than brain-washing, but it works superbly because the listener doesn’t resist as he resists advertisements. He doesn’t know we’re doing it. That’s why it works so effectively. Oh yes,” he ploughed over her question, “it certainly works. We put out a few slogans for Spike Shaw recently: Spike is all right, the Commons needs common people, and what about Spike Milligan. One of the slogans was on your record. We can even put across a complex message. And as you probably know, the man was elected against all probability. So as you say, bully for us.”

“You need a new man to write your slogans.”

“We need an army, Emma, or at least a rabble as they had in the French revolution, and we need figureheads for the rabble to follow such as you and Aaron Hammett.”

Emma sat on the fat man’s bed and gaped. “Nothing less than a revolution? Stop leering at those silly girls and concentrate! Are you really mad or is this the American way of thinking big?”

“You don’t learn, Emma!” The folds of flesh below his jaw quivered angrily

and he waddled across the cabin to fetch a riding crop. “The difficulty about revolution has always been popular support, you can’t normally get ten million people behind you without help from newspapers and the mass media - of which the main mass medium is education. So many people who will lose their positions from a revolution know what is happening that they put it down before it ever begins. But we’ve changed all that. The ten million people know they will follow us without knowing who or what, and the government doesn’t expect a thing. Is that madness?”

“No.” Emma seldom disagreed with people flourishing a riding crop. “Napoleon was a chubby little man as well, and he was sane, so I’m told.” The Rhythm Girls had covered themselves in brown liquid Eau de Lys make-up, they had zipped up their jersey sun-suits and returned to the party. “It’s the people who *think* they are Napoleon who drift into asylums.”

She rolled sharply across the bed as Horace lashed out. She was faster than him and she put the table between them for a few seconds while he ranted about discipline and the modern world. She swayed out of range three times and ducked once. The gratifying swish through the air pleased Horace Horton, he was developing a feverish flush and a thwacking blow that landed noisily on a cushion made him pant with anticipation.

“I’ll have you screaming like all the rest of them,” he gasped.

“Is this part of your revolution,” she asked cautiously, “or a private game between ourselves?”

“It’s private, Emma, but it isn’t a game. You won’t be able to walk for a fortnight—”

“I just didn’t want to spoil the scheme of things.” She sidestepped a cut from the riding crop and somersaulted over the table. Her left foot flicked in a knife blow against the side of his throat in passing and she landed the other side with her fingers buried deep in his stomach. Horace gave a strangled yell and then collapsed gasping for breath across the table.

The riding crop was loose in his grasp and Emma took it. With some hard practice Horton might enjoy this. One hand firmly on the back of his neck and her other hand raised... Then she noticed everyone down in the lounge waving up at her, cheering and spurring her on through the window. They were good sports, and they all loved a winner. Emma threw the crop on to Horton’s bed and went out on deck. The grovelling business man remained in his cabin.

The sea was lapping quietly at the sides of the boat and the rhythm was so hypnotic that Emma stayed leaning on the rail for nearly five minutes. She decided that at midnight she’d go for a swim, unless the guests on the boat turned rowdy and started pushing each other overboard. The sea made people do

some funny things.

Emma found to her surprise that she still had her handbag with her. She took out the small transistorised fountain pen and pressed the clip. The sea breeze was blowing out to sea and her whispered "Come in, Steed. Where the devil are you?" was wafted out across the Atlantic. There was no answer. She muttered a few comments on Steed's contempt for gadgetry.

Or did they take away your fountain pen in prison?

They did. "Here, Bert," she heard, "this fountain pen is goin' off like a bleedin' alarm clock."

"Bung it in the fire bucket!"

"Hello," Emma said urgently. "Who are you?"

"Hey, Bert, it's a bleedin' radio."

"Are you the duty officer in the prison tonight?" Emma hissed.

"Ere, let me talk to it. Hello hello hello, are you receiving me? Come in, please!"

"Don't get carried away," Emma snapped. "Just identify yourself."

"H.M. Prison, Kirkham—"

"Don't tell her that, Bert, she might try to spring him. This pen belongs to his bleedin' lordship."

Yes, that sounded like Steed. Emma switched off the radio and put it back in her handbag. Then she flinched as somebody spoke from further along the deck. She hadn't noticed Ellis Dee over there.

"I suppose it's pretty corny, us standing up here looking at all those lights in the distance. Can you think of something original to say?"

"It's nice."

"Well done. All the really true things are corny. What I like is the fantastic silence. The air must be full of the music Freddie James is playing in the studio. Ten million people are listening to it, but where is it? There's only silence."

"That's science," she said carefully.

Ellis ambled slowly across to her and offered a bottle of whisky. "No? You're very wise." He stood beside her for a few moments and they pondered together. "Four miles away and a bit there are men and money and hospitals, people dying and crying and going mad. I prefer it out here."

"You're drunk."

"A little. So if I tell you I love you, pay no attention. Love is one of my favourite words, but it's damned easy to cure: a sharp kick in the groin puts it all in perspective. I talk too much, I drink too much and I'm often self-pitying. I dislike those dollar Bible salesmen downstairs and the Rhythm Girls should stick to what they can do and stop yakking. Do you want to sleep with me tonight?"

Emma laughed. “I don’t want to sound English about this, but aren’t you rushing things a little?”

“I suppose so,” he said sadly. “I just thought you might need comforting. Horace Horton wants to kill you, and that guy at the end of your pocket radio won’t be able to help. He wasn’t able to help Gloria...”

“It was kind of you to offer. Shall we go back downstairs now? There’s a breeze blowing up.”

When they reached the lounge they found an argument going on between Nick Dickinson and Horton, but it stopped awkwardly when they realised Emma was there. She gathered that Nick was saying no at last, he’d sat back and watched them long enough and the time had come... The kind of stand people take when it is too late.

“For a weekend party,” Emma announced brightly, “this is slow in taking off.”

“It’s a business party,” Silberbaum snapped. “Great to be here, Julius. We’re all just thrilled, ha ha ha, just thrilled.”

But the embarrassed pause continued. They all watched Ellis Dee lope angularly across the desert to the bar, renew his whisky bottle and then coil himself up beside Miss Simpson. “Hi,” he drawled. “Enjoying the scene? or do you think we should persuade Horace to show us his war wound?”

The Rhythm Girls giggled formally and then stopped.

“As I was saying,” Horton piped with deliberate indiscretion, “we can afford to dispense with Emma. Everything will be over before the police even know she is dead. We don’t need her!”

“Horace, Horace my boy, you’re hysterical,” Silberbaum intoned. “You forget that Gloria Munday is no use because - as I’m sure you’ll recall in the morning, she’s dead.”

“Quite,” said Horton. “That’s my point. Listen, Julius, once in every generation a man or woman captures the imagination of the world and becomes a God. Florence Nightingale, Lawrence of Arabia, Rudolph Valentino, Churchill, James Dean - they were all people whose persontilities fitted the needs of the time. They lived as the ordinary people dreamed of living, although an extra dimension of drama had to be added by war or an early death. I think we could use somebody like that. So we’ll make Gloria Munday into this century’s Florence Nightingale.”

“That’s a good idea, Horace, we might do that. But Emma is on our side, isn’t that so, Emma?” Silberbaum turned to her in honest invitation.

She nodded. “I don’t know what’s going on, but at least I’m here.”

A series of high pitched bleeps started up in Emma’s handbag, and that was the end of argument. The two burly engineers who had been standing casually

behind her now seized one arm each. Silberbaum took her handbag. He looked as if she had let him down personally. When he found the transistorised fountain pen he shrugged towards Horton. “All right, you can have her.”

“I told you, Julius, she had to be a spy—”

“In that case you blundered, didn’t you?” He fiddled with the pen’s casing until he detected the switch on the clip. “Hello hello hello, are you receiving me? This is Kirkham Prison. Come in please!” Silberbaum snapped the pen in half and threw the pieces across the lounge.

“Don’t touch her, Horton, or I’ll kill you.” It was Nick Dickinson looking very young and fragile in the role of hero. “She came on my ticket because she’s one of my singers...”

Silberbaum had found a small Italian Beretta 7.65 mm. in Emma’s handbag and he was pointing it in the direction of her stomach. “Shut up, Nick, this is becoming unpleasant. You know I dislike a mess. But she’s obviously working for someone else, no?”

“I don’t care!” Nick suddenly sprang at the gun, knocked it upwards and a shot crashed through the bulkhead. One of Emma’s bodyguards rushed to join the struggle. That was convenient; she dropped to one knee and tossed her guard across her back. He landed at Horace Horton’s feet with a broken arm. But the brawl ended as abruptly as it began with a second shot. Nick was hit this time, in the shoulder. He sat abruptly on the floor, looking as if he couldn’t believe it. Then he clutched his shoulder, saw the blood oozing through his fingers, and fainted.

“Don’t move, Emma!”

The Rhythm Girls were thrown into a panic by the sight of blood and they stampeded past the unconscious Nick, between Silberbaum and Emma towards the stairs. Emma seized Horace Horton by the arm and twisted his humped little body upright before her. Then, using him as a shield, she backed towards the stairs.

“Don’t shoot, Julius,” Horton gasped. “Please... “

Emma jerked his arm savagely. “The smell of your fear, Horace, is mixed with too much perspiration and talcum powder.”

They went slowly up the stairs while Silberbaum watched through his pebble glasses. He didn’t fire. When they reached the door Emma shoved Horton back down the flight of stairs and ran for the deck. She could still hear the terrified man’s yells as she dived over the side of the boat.

6

Steed breaks jail

The sea was icy cold, black, and infinite. There were no lights visible from the shore and the distant specks of the stars were a million miles away. Only the dark cliff of the S.S. *Gloria* loomed out of the empty water. Emma bobbed about helplessly with the chiffon shift clinging to her limbs like seaweed and her hair washing back and round her face with the waves. The sea was more than icy, it was irresistibly powerful. She allowed herself to be pitched at the stern of the boat and then she pushed her way round to the screws.

Already the night air was filling with voices.

"She must have jumped overboard."

"Never mind, that, just search the ship, no?"

"Klaus, shine some lights overboard."

A powerful beam of light hit the sea and swept slowly round in a semi-circle. "I can't find her, captain!"

"Friedl, the boats! Lower a boat." The activity on deck sounded like the whole German army on manoeuvres.

Emma was beginning to shiver uncontrollably. If she was staying in the sea much longer she'd have to start swimming! But the shudder of rusty winches warned that a search party was putting to sea. Only ten feet away a lifeboat hit the water - a sinister silhouette with four ghostly figures hunched over the oars and Horace Horton standing like Captain Ahab in the bows. Instead of a harpoon he held a gun. And they rowed purposefully off towards the circle of light.

Emma slipped round the other side of the boat, lowered herself again into the sea and started swimming. She assumed the shore to be in the direction the lifeboat was pointing so she struck out at a right-angle. She intended to swim for about a quarter of a mile parallel to the coast and then head for Blackpool. That way she might avoid the searchlight, and Horace Horton probably expected her to set a straight course.

Each time the beam of light swept round at her she dived under water. That wouldn't have helped very much if the light had settled on her, but luckily the man behind the action had a strong sense of rhythm and the light swept by at a constant tempo.

After twenty minutes Emma turned what she hoped was shorewards. The lights had gone out on the boat, the voices were inaudible and the sea was surprisingly silent. Emma lay on her back and rested. The frequent dives had tired her too quickly so she did a leisurely back stroke in the probable direction of Britain. And with any luck she'd be there in four hours.

Her stomach heaved painfully as Emma tried to spit out mouthfuls of sea water. She must have fallen asleep, or lost consciousness. Her limbs were so frozen that she couldn't be sure they were moving properly. Was she still swimming? Emma flapped her legs on the water. Well, they were still there. She'd been swimming for more than four hours, and there wasn't a light in sight. Oh Christ - what a way to go to America. So long as she didn't lose consciousness again, or get cramp. And if only the ghastly taste of sea water would go away. She carried on swimming. After so long it was purely automatic, arm over arm with legs scissoring sluggishly. It was another hour before her mind gave up entirely, but her body carried on swimming, sluggishly.

Steed was prostrate in the middle of his cell, his head jutting awkwardly sideways as if he had had a fit. Along the landing below the slow, heavy footsteps of the warder making his night round. Slipping back the metal flap and peering in each dimly lighted cell and then letting the flap fall with a slight, excruciating rustle. The three in the morning tour was an extra security precaution the governor had taken to impress Lord Mountbatten, one of several recent differences between prison and a bloody holiday camp.

The slow footsteps echoed up the metal staircase to the next landing and then set off, peering in the sixty cells at the sixty sleeping prisoners, eventually reaching Steed's door. The warder slipped back the metal flap and paused. "Are you all right?" he called. But there was no answer. He let the flap fall with a slight, excruciating rustle.

The heavy footsteps passed on round the third landing and then echoed down the metal staircase, down into the hall and away. D block was silent for about ten minutes before the warder returned with the cursing prison doctor. They jangled keys, swore about new prisoners who try to commit suicide in that first fortnight, and opened the door of cell number 27.

"All right, buster, what's wrong with you?" The warder prodded him in the kidneys with an eighteen-inch truncheon. "Let's have you." Still no reaction, so the warder turned him over with his left foot. "Seems to be out cold, sir," he

concluded.

The warder and the doctor bent over Steed without further caution. Steed crashed their heads together and in the same movement squeezed the nerve-centres below their carotid arteries. They lost consciousness without making a murmur.

Steed reckoned on approximately half an hour before they would start yelling. He stripped the warder and put the uniform on himself. The warder was a thin man who vanished into insignificance without his uniform; if there had been no prison service he'd have had to keep dogs. Steed breathed out, and made a mental note not to breathe again until he was clear away.

He locked the cell door on the two prisoners and then went downstairs, walking slowly, heavily, like a Man in a Woman's Novel. Clump, clump, clump, swinging the lethal truncheon and listening to the rhythmic jangle of the keys against his right leg. What on earth could motivate a man to do this all his life? Well, Mort, I guess I like helping people.

There was a barred gate from the hall that opened to the third key. He was in a stone corridor with an office at one end and a supplies store at the other. While Steed was locking the gate behind him a man spoke from the office.

"What was that all about, Bert?"

"Here," Steed grunted. He waved the man over without turning round. A few yards away the man stopped and began to ask a question. Steed moved quickly. He clouted the man in the larynx with the truncheon and while he was gasping for air Steed knocked him out. There was only one more door out of D block and into the open air.

It was poetic, he reflected, and so easy to escape by using force. The warders relied unquestioningly on force to make the prisoners co-operate, and therefore by strength or cunning you can cease co-operating and just leave. Without worrying about hidden alarm systems, closed circuit television or the normal gadgets of Steed's working day. Prisons are only secure as long as prisoners agree to remain in them.

Steed whistled a few bars of Pomp and Circumstance while he marched round to the administration block. Getting over the thirty foot wall should be easy enough, but he had a better idea. He would prefer to leave in a dignified manner. And yesterday, when he had been summoned to the governor's office to meet the chaplain, Steed had noticed a Rolls-Royce in the yard. It was being serviced by one of the prisoners and luckily it was still there.

The sparking plugs were on the running board, doubtless waiting to be cleaned, and the carburettor was, partly dismantled. But a Rolls belongs to Elgar's England, the sparking plugs would spark and the carburettor supply the

fuel even without a total modernisation. The ignition key was missing (the single indication that the governor didn't trust his men, or force of habit from the outside world), so Steed joined the wires beneath the bonnet to start the engine. It took altogether four minutes and the car was ready. Steed drove in phantom majesty to the main gates of the prison.

He hooted. A few moments later he poked his head through the car window and waved for the gates to be opened. The regulation peaked cap was convincing and the governor's own car was galvanising. Two warders instantly rushed to open the gates.

Steed was rather dismayed to find that the entrance had double gates; he drove through the first lot and they closed behind him before the second ones were opened. He was trapped.

"Here, I don't know you, do I?"

"No," Steed snapped. "And I don't know you. Are you going to open those doors or have we stopped for a cup of tea?"

The other warder was already opening the massive doors while his colleague thought. "Where are you taking that car then?"

"Governor Peterson wants it to visit the Home Office in the morning. Look, check on it while I'm gone, or we'll all be on the carpet."

"What do you think, Charlie?"

Charlie opened his mouth to answer, then he gaped as the car shot past him and down the forecourt. As Steed turned left on to the main road he waved amiably to the baffled warders. That was one advantage of a para-military organisation, nobody used their common sense. It would be several minutes before those two plucked up the courage to telephone the governor.

"My God," called Bunny Bennett, "old Steed has found honest work at last! Look, Mabel, here's old Steed come to join us for breakfast. He's a screw!"

"Well, not exactly—"

"Looks as if it pays damned well. Shame you couldn't afford those few extra pounds for a Bentley..."

Steed winced. The price of hearty friends. "As a matter of fact I've escaped from *behind* bars. I was a prisoner."

"That's more like it," said Bennett, as he ushered Steed into the dining-room. "I thought your average screw wouldn't gad about the country in a Rolls. Did you leave before breakfast? Mabel, throw another rasher of bacon into the pan —"

"Just a tomato juice, please, Mabel, and perhaps a piece of toast."

Bunny Bennett had many tiresome qualities, not to mention a tiresome wife, but to his eternal credit he lived in Lytham St. Annes. That was only ten miles from Kirkham and it was the expensive half of Blackpool. So Steed subsided into a comfortable chair and chatted about these Rolls-Royce cars now that B.M.C. have taken over. And the three months they spent in a prison camp near Mannheim.

"We soon got out of there, eh?" Bennett laughed. "Too many bloody British bombs about for safety."

Mabel was less romantic than her husband. "Isn't it," she asked as she served Steed with lightly done toast, "slightly different when you escape from a British prison? I mean, you're welcome, Major Steed, but—"

"Nonsense," Bennett interrupted, "the principle is exactly the same. It's the prisoner's duty to escape and the gaoler's duty is to shoot him in the attempt. One of the rules. The trouble today is that people are trying to change all the rules... "

"Really Nigel!" She smiled wearily at Steed; the things she had to put up with! "I'll make some more coffee."

This was better than the lump of porridge he'd been having for breakfast the last four days. Steed found he was enjoying the smell of polish on the furniture, the warm smell of carpets again. All he needed now was a panatella. "I've just realised," he said apologetically,' "that I've come out without any money, and I've left my clothes behind. Would you mind... "

Not another word! Bennett's taste was rather more tweedy than Steed would have wished and his ties were liable to vulgar splashes of colour. But he meant well, and there were plenty of carnations in the front garden from which to choose the day's buttonhole. By ten o'clock Steed was feeling human again.

"I suppose you don't have a short wave radio transmitter?"

Bunny Bennett grinned proudly. "No. Never did understand those damned things. I do have a television set, but that needs a man with a spanner as well. What about using the telephone?"

Steed explained that Mrs. Peel was the mobile type who could only be reached by radio. "She carries a micro-set in her handbag," he muttered. It sounded ridiculous when you said things like that to Bennett.

"Emma Peel? She's another one of your pop singers, isn't she?"

"Well, not exactly... "

"She's in Blackpool somewhere, or out at sea. My dear old horse, don't buck and whinny like that. I've been listening to Radio Gloria since we blundered into the teenage riot. I don't know why because the music drives me mad, but I was so baffled... After all, Radio Gloria must be up to something, mustn't it? So I

listen to it sometimes."

"But how do you know that Mrs. Peel is up here?" Steed demanded.

"One of those disc jockeys said so. Fellow called Ellis Dee played one of her records. Went through that routine about her being a fabulous girl who had been on board the boat until three o'clock this morning. Apparently she then started swimming for shore." Bennett shrugged apologetically. "That's what he said. Perhaps it was a party and she got drunk... "

Steed frowned. "Why should he say a thing like that? Unless—"

"He said it three times in forty minutes. But those comperes say some funny things, they tell you when a chappie brings them coffee—"

"Unless he was trying to help. Mrs. Peel toured with him for a week so they may be friends. Bunny, we have to act fast! Do you know about currents around these shores?"

He grinned proudly. "No." He was repetitive as well. "Shall we examine the maps? The first rule for a successful general: when in doubt, send for a map."

To Steed's amazement the maps were useful and Bennett began displaying his officer initiative as the morning wore on. They studied tides and currents until it seemed almost certain that Emma's probable landing place was a cove four miles to the south of Lytham. So that was where they went after Bunny Bennett had left the Rolls outside Blackpool police station.

It was a derelict beach, littered with the flotsam of a decade and still ostensibly the property of the War Ministry. Keep Out. Beware of Mines. Keep your head down in case of flying missiles and don't leave your ice-cream cornets in the sand. Steed stood on a grass mound and surveyed the area through Bennett's binoculars. He lit his third panatella within the hour, but the gale from the atlantic made him splutter. He was beginning to feel that this was a waste of time. Mrs. Peel was indestructible, whatever Ellis Dee might think.

"Steed!" Bennett was half way up a tree doing an imitation of Raleigh catching sight of the Pacific. "Steed. There's something coming in!" He clambered down and ran to the water's edge. "About thirty feet out."

It wasn't anybody swimming. It bobbed into view and vanished again. A corpse. Steed lowered his binoculars with a shaking hand. The corpse was a mauvish blue, puffed up and unrecognisable. They waited for another fifteen minutes before the body was washed ashore.

Bunny Bennett looked at it, turned away, and was sick. "It's an alsatian dog," he spluttered. "Poor old thing."

Steed turned bleakly away.

"Hey, Steed!" It was a voice from the next bay calling. "I'm afraid you must brace yourself for an embarrassing moment." Emma Peel, in wispy tatters but

otherwise indestructible, tottered towards them.

7

George Washington plays it cool

"If that nigger calls me yes-suh-boss-Mr. White Man again," growled Aaron Hammett, "I'll smash his woollen head."

"C'mon, Aaron baby, don't let him bug you. Let's take it from the twenty-fourth bar."

"What in hell's name is that?"

"It goes like this, Aaron baby. Weeee - ba dum.."

The violins came in on cue, the sitar player took up the whine and the three Sol Fars began humming against the melodic line. A crisis had been averted.

George Washington was enjoying himself. Maybe it wasn't striking a blow for racial equality, but then Aaron Hammett wasn't equal. An Alabama cotton picker who regarded George Washington's Cambridge accent as a personal slight. Man, he couldn't even sing! Who ever heard of a record *made* by technicians from electronic sounds and distortions? Yes, that sure was a freak-out, and let me see you sing that on stage. The halcyon days when Elvis Presley turned the world upside down were a long time gone. Yes sir, and so was Elvis Presley. Into the army to make the world safe for Germans. Oh lawdie, they were looking at him again.

"Can't you get that coon out of the studio? He's singing Blue Suede Shoes over there."

"C'mon baby, he's a technician. It's not as if he's singing We Shall Overcome."

"Technician? Well, there's this tape here that records the Sol Fars, and when the producer raises his hand to me I increase the volume and when he lowers his hand I turn it down. Balance. And sometimes when the tape runs out I change the spool. Very technical, man, and better than sweeping floors. I was sweeping the studio floors until Miss Heatherington talked to me. I'm too clever to sweep floors, she said, I mean dahling with a degree in law you could be doing something creative. Like increasing the volume when the producer... And I'll be fired next time she gets me into a goddam corner. Straight down to the Kilburn Labour Exchange with all those Irishmen and Nigerians.

Just stick to your post, Steed had said, get hold of those tapes and do a

complete analysis of the sound. “But she’s thin and nearly fifty—”

Britain was built on personal sacrifice, Washington. Use your initiative. Then the pips had sounded so Mr. Steed had rung off. He was right, of course, yes suh, it had been built on personal sacrifice. For centuries. And this was one Jamaican who wished it would stop.

“Great, Aaron baby, now let’s just do that last phrase again? And give it a bit more soul, you know, baby.”

Aaron Hammett was considered the greatest soul singer since Ray Charles. The reviewers always say that he has that real coloured sound. Which is good to have if you’re white. My sister Mimba Washington could do without it. Hammett sang the last phrase again and then left the studio with his goddam entourage. Eight people in tow, leaving the real work to be done by the technicians. His was only one more part of the noise to be processed.

The session players packed up their instruments and went away to collect their fees and the Sol Fars went off to a party. George Washington fetched himself a cup of coffee from the automatic machine in the corridor and then went back to watch the producer doing the work.

“If you mean to send up every jerk who finds his way into this studio,” the producer muttered without looking up, “you’ll waste an awful lot of nervous energy.”

He was a substitute producer because Nick Dickinson hadn’t appeared. They didn’t want him. Aaron Hammett wanted the Nick Dickinson sound on his recording, not the workmanlike and competent Colin Matthews sound. “Man, I have nervous energy to spare.”

“You’re going to need it.”

Miss Heatherington was an executive producer, whatever that meant, and she was standing authoritatively at the control room door. “I thought the whole thing went off rather well,” she chanted. “You were marvellous, Colin darling, and I thought Aaron Hammett asked for all he got.”

Yea. It’s a good thing I’m not sensitive.

George Washington hung about, looking his usual languid self but feeling inwardly trapped. He had to stay in the studio until the master tape was finished - which should be by three in the morning if Colin Matthews didn’t think up any new effects. Well, that was easy enough: secret agents do it all the time. But they aren’t misunderstood by concupiscient women who think it’s a sign.

“How long before we can hear the playback?” she asked.

“Six hours,” Matthews grunted. “And I still don’t see why it’s such a rush. I mean, dammit darling, what difference does a day make?”

“Six hours will be fine. I’ll come back at three o’clock.” She turned with a

devastating smile to George Washington. “Perhaps you could drive me home, darling?”

It’s the red Jaguar that does it. Goddam, even a hunch-backed Chinaman couldn’t fail to score in that Jag. A hundred miles an hour works wonders, especially on the police. Miss Heatherington sat in the passenger seat and loosened her blue-blonde hair just like the chicks in the advertisements. She smiled with her mouth open and gave a B.P. gasp of pleasure.

“By the way,” said George Washington, “where do you live?”

“I have a studio on the river in Wapping.”

Close to the roots, near the Prospect of Whitby and all those divine pubs where Queenie Something sings and Daniel Farson plays mine host, with Colin MacInnes writing novels next door and a convenient brothel just across the road. The people in Wapping are so much more real. All those wharfs and cargo boats and on the other side of the river those massive cranes of Surrey Docks. “You have a romantic streak in you,” said George Washington. He negotiated the perilous narrow streets between old Dickensian slums and derelict bomb sites and towering blocks of council flats.

“Just down here,” said Miss Heatherington, “on the right.”

It looked almost like a warehouse from the outside, but the transformation once through the front door was total. Everything faced on to the river and it was, as she had said, a studio flat. There was so much electrical equipment in the main playroom that if you glanced thoughtlessly out of the wide glass window you’d think you were in the control room of a ship. The curtains were pale lemon, the woodwork white, and the carpet pale fawn, giving a spaceous Japanese effect. When Miss Heatherington told him to sit down George Washington almost sat cross-legged on the carpet. Then he saw a divan against one wall - that was the living room bit. With a coffee table and some bookshelves. In addition there was a bedroom up the spiral staircase and a tiny kitchen down the brief flight of steps.

“What do you drink?” she asked. She belonged to the martini set herself but there were some cans of beer downstairs in the fridge. George Washington relaxed; six hours would soon pass and with any luck the union jack would still be flying at the end of it.

“You spend a lot of time hanging round the studio, watching and taking note of everything,” she said sympathetically. She sat on the carpet by his feet.

“I’m trying to learn, Miss Heatherington. I want to learn the producing business...”

“Call me Sandra.” Her name wasn’t Langulala after all. “Have you ever thought of becoming a singer? You seem to have the glamour and the authority

you'd need."

Yes, ma'am, and I have that coloured sound as well.

"The American negro singers don't make sufficient impact in this country because they look middle-aged and they use too much hair oil. But a superb young man like you..."

Twenty-two ma'am, and I've never used hair oil in my life.

"I think Donyale Luna has started a big colour trend."

Yea, like the *Sunday Times* supplement and Cassius Clay. Take your hand off my leg. It wouldn't be so bad if she'd use a different gambit, preferably not the one about how you must find it cold in this country and not that other one either. "I'm not looking for that kind of glory, Miss Sandra. I'm a lawyer, and that's good enough so that when I go back home in a year I can go into politics. Until then I'd rather earn a normal living in this country, so that I can learn about your people and the ways of democracy." Well, you can't tell people like her that you're learning about security and power in a modern state, so that when Jamaica becomes independent...

"Don't be nervous, darling. There's plenty of time to learn the producing business. You can come here and learn in my studio. I'll enjoy the company, and I'm sure we'll have lots of fun. Do you like women?"

"Some I do and some I don't. If you're going to take my shirt off we could have another bar of the electric fire on."

"You must find it cold in this country."

"Well no, it's not often—"

"Ssh. Just relax and stop talking. Leave it to me."

"Are you awake?"

"Yes." Her voice sounded like a small girl's in the darkness. Perhaps all women were small girls beneath the façade of money and fashion until they became old women. "I was watching the ships going down the river. They look very beautiful at night." She was clinging to him, afraid that once he went away she would be alone.

"It's half-past two," said George Washington. "You're due back at the recording studio soon."

She sighed and moved her head on to his chest. "Damn Aaron Hammett. I'll do the extra dubbing tomorrow. What difference does a day make? Let's stay here together."

"Yes, Miss Sandra." Her name was really Langulala.

Emma stayed in bed and slept for thirty-six hours. “We might as well hole up here for the rest of the week,” said Steed. “What difference does a week make? Our man in London can look after the situation until the crusade opens at Harringay.”

“Who’s our man in London?” asked Emma. She looked disgracefully attractive on her bed of sickness.

“George Washington. He seems to be rising fast in that recording studio. Expects to meet us up here with full details of how the subliminal messages work and precisely what the texts are. Poor chap. He’s gadding about with some female executive.”

“Poor female executive.” Emma went back to sleep with a contented smile still playing around her mouth. Steed pottered off downstairs to play another round of clock golf with Bennett. The pace beside the sea was slow. Later in the afternoon they went for a walk along the promenade. The air was so good for the lungs.

They followed a pair of wakes week relics who started at one end of the golden mile and systematically went on everything, ate everything, put a penny in every slot, until they reached the other end. They had their weight spoken, their weight guessed and their strength tested. At half-past five they staggered brokenly into a pub and remained there. But luckily there were thousands of people like them, thronging the front in a desperate good time, so Steed’s chances of being spotted by the police were minimal.

Bunny Bennett insisted on taking him into the fun fair, on the principle that everything has to be suffered once in your lifetime, and so Steed spent several minutes watching a laughing sailor screeching with pointless mirth and then a couple of seconds witnessing the Algerian hook torture. There were other tortures on display but they were much the same - vulgar and unamusing.

“I don’t know what you expected,” Bennett protested when they were back on the sea front. “These places aren’t supposed to be enjoyable.”

“I don’t like fat women, two-headed calves or candy floss.”

“Nobody does, old fruit, but when you’re stranded at the seaside there’s nothing else to do. Fancy a pint of warm beer?”

Steed glared at an unattractive girl in a kiss-me-quick hat. The young ones were all hunting for the opposite sex and the middle-aged ones were getting drunk, all with sullen determination. “Let’s go back for supper.”

That was another mistake.

They had Lancashire hot pot because they were in Lancashire and Mabel wanted to do the place justice. Thank God they weren’t in Yorkshire. “Never could stand Yorkshire pudding,” Steed murmured elusively. “And Welsh rarebit

can lie on the stomach late at night. A gastronome is only really safe in Vichy. There's nothing like a drink of water.

Mabel became more nervous as the meal progressed and when her husband said "Ah, plum duff" she almost burst into tears. "The British army won the war on plum duff," he said greedily.

"There are worse fates than losing a war," Steed pronounced.

Mabel retired early, leaving Bunny Bennett to serve the Madeira sherry. It was agreed that tomorrow as a special treat; Steed would prepare the meal, and she wouldn't even need to wash up. "Give yourself a nice rest, my dear."

"Ah," said Bennett as he flopped into a deep armchair, "I enjoy a good blow-out."

Emma Peel was sitting up in bed eating breakfast next morning when Steed went up with the *Daily Telegraph*. She was fully recovered and eager to return to work.

"We'll have to remain in hiding, I'm afraid. I've achieved overnight fame." The story of his gaol break had been released and a rather evil-looking photograph was staring out from the front page. "It's infuriating," said Steed. "They've given me a slight double chin. You see, it's the angle—"

"My dear Steed, you should sue them."

"Good lord. Do you think I'm a dangerous psychopath?" he asked innocently.

"Only when provoked."

"They say I'm dangerous." Suddenly he smiled delightedly. "The Home Secretary has asked for a special report. Fancy that. And Peter Simple is advocating that prisons should be cleared of criminals and preserved as a haven of safety for innocent people. Like burglar-proof hotels. Leave the rest of England for the thugs and tricksters. Oh dear, he also thinks that General Maxwell Lessing is right to warn the Pentagon about Britain's drift to the left. No, that's not very funny."

Steed lapsed into contemplation.

"Look, couldn't you do the crossword downstairs? I want to use my feminine magic to get rid of the signs of nine hours in salt water. Then we can spend the morning finding out who this female executive is that George Washington—"

"I found out last night. She devours young men whole and doesn't even suffer from indigestion. She also spent three years in the American studios doing research on unspecified techniques. The lad is clearly on to something. But don't worry. He'll be coming to Blackpool when the whole thing's cleared up. We can just relax and enjoy the sea. Play clock golf and eat candy floss. Do you like

Algerian tortures? Or how do you feel about drinking warm beer? I'd go back to sleep if I were you."

These goddam women executives, they think that business is living and they forget what the rest of human experience is like. They squeeze a sandwich into a working lunch hour and sex into a tea break. No wonder they look so efficient! Langulala Heatherington was really in love with REEL, it was her soul and her goddam baby, but she hit George Washington like it was her last fling at womanhood.

Thank God she worked an eighteen hour day. That only left six hours for her new interest in life. George Washington watched a cargo boat chug by, marked Oslo and filled with chemicals. Romantic nothing! In twenty-four hours he'd not seen one Jamaican ship going through to the port of London. Bremen, Hamburg, Copenhagen, the cities of air-conditioned squalor.

"I can't bear the exotic," said Langulala, "because I know it won't last. It'll grow old and be destroyed. Whereas the drab commerce of Hamburg goes on forever."

Poor old Langulala. The difficulty of making love in the course of duty is that you sympathise. You realise how vulnerable these women are. Love? No, baby, just my big coloured heart. I can't see it the way Steed sees it - he calls it penetrating their organisation. I call it embarrassing.

"You won't last either. You'll learn all you can from me and then move on. Marry one of those exotic negresses." The more emotional she got the more she knocked back those martinis. Which was all right, it made her talk, but it meant that George Washington had to drink all those cans of beer. It was all trotting up the spiral staircase and singing work songs. Patriotism is, as the white man he say, beyond price.

"Miss Langulala, you need too much reassurance. Why don't you enjoy me while I'm here. Forget about whether I like you, or whether you're my English status symbol, or mother figure, witch surrogate. I can't help you be forty-nine next birthday. You just be grateful, Miss Langulala."

"I'm drunk, Georgie, don't listen to me. I always get scared when I relax like this."

She walked unsteadily across the playroom to her recording toys. George Washington watched her sadly. He didn't want to lead her on, to trap her into showing him the "final" tapes that she brought home to dub in private. He watched her narrow thighs swinging beneath the midnight blue negligee, tight and sad and pleading to be taken seriously. All women ought to be beautiful. He

dreaded the moment when she would start boasting about her plans for world domination.

"If I ever had to leave England suddenly," she said in that tragic whisky voice, "I'd like to live in Port Maria. Do you think Goldeneye is still for sale since its owner died?" She was fiddling with the Aaron Hammett recording. ,

"If you had to go there suddenly," said George Washington, "you wouldn't want to know me. My father is Chief of Police." He stood behind her chuckling and leaned her gently against his chest.

"I don't like three o'clock in the morning," said Miss Heatherington. "Everything is so wrong, so trusting, and all the things I want to say are the wrong things to say. I want to tell you how frightened I am, and you don't say things like that to virile young men or they go away. Shall we have another drink?"

George Washington poured her another martini. "You just gotta be careful, Missa Langulala, in case I start telling you all the things I lie awake and dream about when the duppy is after me." He pressed the switch that set of Aaron Hammett's hit. "Come and sit on this expensive carpet with me."

"I sometimes yearn to get out of England."

"That's because you play silly games in English politics." She went rigid beneath his hands. "Well anyway, that's the rumour in the studios. Who cares about English politics?"

She licked the cherry and swallowed the martini in one gulp. "I know, it's silly. I'm more concerned with the real issues." She moved his hands across her breasts and on to the slightly scraggy stomach. "They don't work any more, they're dehydrated and dead."

"You can fool most of the people most of the time," he murmured.

"A woman who can't have children isn't a woman any more. That's why this dried up body is so obscene. It doesn't fool anybody." She trembled in his arms and a large tear gathered in the corner of her eye, she blinked and it splashed on to her navel. "I suppose power is the only thing left for me. Politics and plotting... because at least it uses all of my intelligence. I spent years of research looking into the psychology of sound, how much meaning the ear can register and whether conscious hearing relates to memory. I'm very intelligent, Georgie, very brilliant scientist."

She tottered away to the bar, looking white and tipsy.

"I'd better put you to bed," said George Washington.

Half an hour later he went back down to the studio. He worked rapidly in the half light reflected from the river, quietly playing through all Langulala's tapes and then putting REEL's recent discs on a frequency computer. Perhaps if he

didn't make it as Prime Minister of Jamaica he'd go into the record business. There were openings for a man who understood why a sound-wave makes its effect on the ear drum without your "hearing" it, who understands which disassociated noises are connected up unconsciously by a judicious musical beat. The only problem was to work the process backwards to find the message.

In fact, it wasn't possible.

Unless you took one happy moron and sat him down to listen vacuously to Aaron Hammett's latest hit, and then asked him what he was thinking. What am I thinking, George Washington asked himself. He opened another can of beer and listened to the record. Closed his eyes and relaxed. To set her free, that was how the lyric went, she'll follow me. Me being Aaron Hammett. The white trash! Setting free all the weak pinkoes in England. Lawd a-mercy Miss Langulala aren't we being naive just a little?

"You treacherous black bastard, you've been making a fool of me!" She was sitting at the top of the spiral staircase, peering over the rich pine banister. "You're a bloody spy!"

"I'm born nosey, Miss Langulala. You know what black boys are like. They dismantle watches to find out how they work. How long have you been sitting there?"

"About ten minutes." She stood up, wavered slightly and then walked slowly down the stairs. "I knew you didn't love me - that wasn't the arrangement. But I thought you were here to pick my brains, learn the record business and win promotion.... It never occurred to me that you were a traitor." She smiled grotesquely. "I hope I didn't make you feel too sick."

George Washington banged his beer can on the coffee table and raised his voice. "My only complaint, Miss Heatherington, is that *you* despise yourself. If there was a mirror in this room - and of course there isn't - I'd force you to strip and look at yourself. You have so much self pity! You bore me when you talk like that."

"Do you work for that fellow Steed?"

"Yes. I'm a spy, and most of the time I sweep floors and lead a very boring life. But just this once I make love to a beautiful woman as if it was a television play. And man, she talks the romance right out of it!"

That was the right thing to say. Miss Sandra Heatherington was an enemy, and she might try to kill him, but for the moment she wasn't a woman scorned. She even smiled. "Was I really all right?" She slid back one of the doors beneath the recording table and took out a complex musical score. "I think this is what you were looking for. Read it. And just in case you were wondering how to decode an actual record, you have to feed it through special equipment that eliminates

various wavelengths.... It's rather complicated, and I'm afraid you won't live to patent the process. But you should find it interesting."

George Washington read the score and was enthralled. The message related to Herbert W. Sinclair's crusade, when teenagers were expected to rise up for democracy and Britain's pinko government would meet the fate it deserved. Sophisticated argument was presumably out of place on a pop record. Slogans and assertions, like a goddam election campaign. Appeals to prejudice and reinforcements of popular ignorance. By God. Yes, this was revolution. Man.

"I presume," said George Washington, "that Herbert W. Sinclair's visit to England is meant to be a signal for riots in the streets? And this in addition to your economic attacks, such as strikes and air crashes, these will bring down the government."

Miss Heatherington smiled proudly. "We hope so. It will be terribly democratic, because the mass of public opinion will be on our side. You'll see." She was quite right, as a woman of her age should be. "The fighting will spread so virulently that in a month it will be civil war. Communism versus Britain, and of course the United States will have to send in troops to safeguard democracy."

George Washington laughed in confusion. These goddam civilised countries! "I've lost track of which side are the goodies."

"The forces of communism," she said as if she'd learnt it from a press hand-out, "are the pink government, and the British are the British people who are rising against oppression."

"I should have guessed." He was still sitting comfortably with his beer in his hand. Something would have to happen soon. Maybe she would produce a gun from the folds of her nightdress. She obviously had something planned because she was so self-confident. "What do you plan now, Langulala?" he asked.

"I shall have to kill you." She sat at the control panel and pressed a switch. "I grew very fond of you, Georgie. I wouldn't let anybody else lay hands on you." She fitted earplugs as a high pitched sound began screaming from the loudspeaker - not a loud noise but painfully penetrating, and it grew shriller in intensity. "This sound smashes the ear drums and damages the brain. Death takes about four hours, but don't worry, you lose consciousness rapidly."

George Washington stretched lazily to his feet. "Isn't this rather a waste of good manhood?"

She couldn't hear him. With a sudden leap he was across the room and down the steps to the main entrance next to the kitchen, but the door was locked. The only other way out was through the window and into the river.

He picked up a chair and hurled it at the glass. The chair bounced back into the playroom. The noise was pounding in his brain now, unbearably growing and

making thought impossible. There was no point in attacking Langulala because the sound would continue. He bounded up the stairs into her bedroom.

"You can't escape that way, Georgie!"

He slammed the door shut at the top of the spiral staircase but the agony in his ears continued. The sound had risen beyond the range of consciousness. George Washington leaped blindly at the skylight in a frenzied effort to escape. Anything was better than this death. The skylight was eleven feet high and the glass cut his hands. But he dragged himself through on to the roof.

Man, those Jamaicans can run off with all the medals in the Olympic Games, Arthur Wint and those guys, but amateur status isn't everything. George Washington did a creditable long jump on to the roof of the warehouse next door, and his sprint to the far end was pretty professional. If they ever introduced a drain-pipe event he might even qualify as world champion; he reached the street in ten seconds flat.

Our father which art in heaven, let me reach that goddam Jaguar. Thy kingdom come, I'll settle for Blackpool and we'll argue about on earth as it is in heaven when I've consulted with Mr. Steed. Forgive us our trespasses, because this isn't the time, God, to settle old scores. She's already opened that window up there, and if she starts shooting I'll know you're a white God.

The engine roared at the first push on the button. Lawdie, lawdie, Jesus was a negro after all. George Washington sped off into the night singing praises to him on high. Well done, God. All things bright and beautiful, like Jaguars and girls and enough money and the M.1. and being twenty-two....

"Pass the tomato ketchup, please," said Bennett.

"I think you'll prefer this rough red wine. It marries so well with the rather cloying sauce."

"I like a bit of extra taste to my food."

"For what we are about to receive," Steed snarled, "may the Lord make us truly thankful." The saddle of boar had taken him since the previous evening to prepare. It had just been braising for two hours over the slow fire, and the aroma was seeping deliciously through the house. "It's a recipe I had from Norman Douglas."

"I'd be more impressed," Emma Peel murmured, "if you'd been out this morning and shot the boar yourself."

Steed sat wearily at the table, resigned to five minutes of Mrs. Peel's hunting experiences in the Bavarian foresis and the insensitive gulping of the Bennett family. But as he picked up the knife the telephone rang.

Saddle of boar wouldn't taste the same cold.

"I wish you wouldn't call me yes-suh-boss. Wouldn't you rather come here and nibble a bone with us?" He sighed. "All right, I'll meet you at the station."

George Washington came out of the telephone box and glanced towards the booking office. The thin man in the raincoat was still there, reading an evening paper and standing out like a Russian spy at a cricket match. He'd been on George Washington's tail since he left Preston. Banging after him in that black Consul, and then making that phone call to someone like Horace Horton.

A man like him was difficult to shake off because he stuck so obviously close; you could only clobber him. That wouldn't be British, to clobber a middle-aged man, but it was business. George Washington waited until he estimated the Gents was empty and then went down to the lavatory. He waited there, alone, for nearly five minutes. His shadow wasn't falling for that one. So George Washington went back upstairs feeling irrationally furtive. He half expected someone to ask him what he had been doing down there.

The man was still there, reading his evening paper. So obvious. George Washington waited until two little fat men by the main line platform wandered across to the buffet and then took action. He ran across to the Consul and tried to open the door. The shadow ran after him. "You, hey, that's my car," he cried. And George Washington laid him across the bonnet.

"Good lord," said Steed, "that's Mr. Price. Masquerading under the name of Smith, no doubt, but unmistakable. Stay here, Mrs. Peel, while I rescue the poor man."

He left Emma by the taxi rank and ran across the forecourt to restrain George Washington.

"Hello again," Steed called. "I see you two have met."

"Goddam, this fellow follow me for two and a half hours."

"Inefficiently though. That's Mr. Price's charm. He's wanted by the police for pulling a communication cord..."

They were interrupted by a cry for help. Steed turned round in time to see two little fat men bundling Emma into a car that was already moving out on to the main road. The car was gone before they reached George Washington's Jaguar.

8

“We can’t disrupt the Atlantic Alliance”

“Steed, my boy, you’re over-wrought. Sit down and relax. Have a tomato juice. You know perfectly well I can’t forbid that crusade from taking place. What would the bishops say? All those clerics in the House of Lords... they see persecution of the church behind every state interference already. They haven’t forgotten Mary Tudor. All right then, have a grapefruit. We’ve no evidence for stepping in, have we?”

“They are already causing riots and civil unrest—”

“Evidence.”

“It’s on the gramophone records—”

“Nothing that could be demonstrated in a court of law.”

“But we know where this is leading. General Maxwell Lessing will move in to save the country from communism. We should warn—”

“A lot of fellows in this country wouldn’t mind being rescued from communism. Important fellows. We can’t afford to upset them. Where would this organisation be if we gained a reputation as defenders of communism against the free world?”

Steed sighed. “We’re supposed to be working for the elected British government—”

“Exactly. In case you’ve forgotten, my lad, the British government is an ally of the United States. We can’t disrupt the Atlantic alliance.”

“But we know—”

“Evidence.” His Nibs was testy this morning. He stomped over to the window and glared at the building opposite. Whitehall was a bleak place on Monday mornings. “As far as I know, the only fact is that a pop singer was killed. And since you crashed your way out of gaol everyone thinks you killed her.”

“They’ve kidnapped Mrs. Peel.”

“Bad leadership, I’m afraid, Steed. Thank God you don’t consider her to be in danger. We can’t send the army in to rescue a girl from singing hymns in Harringay stadium.”

“No, sir. Have you any advice before I go?”

“None at all, my boy. Carry on with whatever you’re doing. I’ve no official

business for you." He sat at his desk. The main interview was over. "By the way, how's that fellow Lincoln doing? Abraham Lincoln."

"George Washington. He's a first-class man."

"Jolly good. I fought alongside the Ghurkas in 1916. Damned good soldiers."

"Yes, sir."

Steed restrained himself from slamming the door as he swept out of the room. What about the official business of looking into those air crashes? They knew it was REEL equipment sabotaging both the air force and civil air lines! Weren't these wildcat strikes official business? He pushed the lift button gently with the tip of his umbrella. Calm, Steed. He decided things had been worse when he'd been with M.I.5. More red tape and deferring to outside pressure. The wretched lift still didn't come so he ran down the seven flights of stairs. Perhaps that ninny Spike Shaw wasn't official business?

He jumped into a taxi in the street. "Knightsbridge Mansions," he snapped.

"Okay, Mr. S. Here we go."

"Oh God. What are you doing here?"

"Taking you to safety, Mr. S. His Nibs was worried about you being arrested near the Ministry. After all, the law's pretty thick on the ground in this part of London. Every one of them after a particular escaped convict." He swerved cheerfully round a traffic policeman in Parliament Square. "Are they offering a reward, guv?"

"I don't know."

Benson was the type of sergeant-major who still served his war-time master with class-conscious devotion, but Steed was in no mood for typical cockney humour. If he said apples and pears or trouble and strife, Steed decided, he'd throw the fellow from the car. Had the other ranks really consisted of comic cooks and batmen who reminisced endlessly about the Mile End Road? Benson was a catch-phrase man. It had taken him until 1951 to stop saying "Don't you know there's a war on?"

"What you'll have to do, Mr. S., is grow a beard."

Ha ha. "The lovable thing about genuine London taxi drivers is that most of them are taciturn and unfriendly."

"Another thing, you ought to change your whistle. People could recognise that whistle a mile off—"

"What on earth is a whistle?"

"Clobber, Mr. S., the old schmutter."

He appeared to mean the suit Steed was wearing.

"You could get a peaked hat for seventeen and a kick down the Lane. And it ain't going to rain, is it? There are some nice fashions in men's clobber now."

The old man had a habit of giving Benson this kind of message to serve as small talk on the voyage. Tell young Steed to do something about his appearance, Benson.

"It isn't necessary," said Steed. "We shall have this business cleared up within thirty-six hours. But it will be a dirty thirty-six hours, very nasty, and I shall need my brolly and bowler hat."

"Official business?" Benson asked politely.

"Most definitely not!"

Horace Horton was a single gentleman and he lived in conventional bachelor style. His flat in Knightsbridge Mansions had been simple enough to break into. He had a fine collection of erotica on his bookshelves and a Greek athletic motif in his bathroom decoration. There was some puzzling equipment with a New Orleans trademark in his bedroom; part of the American do-it-yourself cult. But there wasn't any convincing evidence of Horton's business activities. Steed and George Washington had spent nearly two hours searching for anything that would lead them to Mrs. Peel and at the end of it they were baffled. Horton was an odd man. Distinctly odd. He had obviously read about bachelors.

Steed threw the driver a half-crown tip as he left the cab and went into the building. Nodded good day to the doorman and went up to the fourth floor in the lift. He knocked on the door and George Washington opened it.

"He still hasn't been here," said George Washington.

"I thought not. He'll lie low until the commotion starts. They daren't take any risks until tomorrow evening." Steed went through into the living room. Mr. Price, or Smith, was there in his underpants. "Have you persuaded this man to talk yet?"

"We've had a few words." George Washington grinned. "He was hired to wait outside Preston for me, and the idea was to follow me into Blackpool. As soon as I made contact with you he summoned the two kidnappers."

"Not only was that the idea," Steed sighed, "it was what he did. Have you had any more words? Like where Horton is at the moment? Where Mrs. Peel has been taken? We have to smash their set-up by ourselves and quickly."

He went through into the bedroom and sat on an ornate four poster of the kind you see in eighteenth-century engravings. The walls were draped in plush red velvet and the ceiling was black. He hoped that snivelling didn't mean that George Washington was using violence. Steed held up his umbrella behind his back and watched in the massive gilt mirror as he put his bowler hat on the ferrule instead of his head. When W. C. Fields did it it looked funny. A two-dimensional joke. Horton had been a fascist in the 1930s; he had fought on the wrong side in the Spanish civil war, but it was odd that he still exhibited a medal

in his bedroom to prove it. He still read the wrong newspapers: the monthly Rockwell Report, Rubber News and the British National Weekly. But that wasn't illegal.

"I say, Washington, are you knocking that man about?"

"Good lord no, missa Steed suh, boss."

Alias Mr. Smith was standing in the middle of the room in a tight black rubber suit. He cringed and wriggled pleadingly with perspiration already streaming down his face. As nobody spoke he continued obediently to put on a hideous rubber mask.

"What happens now?" asked Steed.

"I'm not sure. This is Horace Horton's secret vice; we found the equipment in the bottom of his wardrobe; but I'm not sure how it works."

"Perhaps Mr. Price is thoroughly enjoying himself."

"He got pretty upset last time he put it on. It seems to constrict the body, and the more he sweats the tighter it gets."

Steed watched with great fascination. He didn't like to feel that there were secret vices that he'd missed out on, but this one baffled him. The glistening black rubber figure groped about for a while and then sat on the floor. The fat on his stomach stood out obscenely, and his whole body was decidedly unattractive. "I expect there's a climax to this," said Steed, "like dropping him and watching him bounce."

"It's called a Bondage Kit on the label." George Washington showed him a box. "There are also these rubber coils and things, but I don't know what they're for."

After a few ingenious minutes they found that the extras were for tying yourself up. So they tied up Mr. Price and left him there to have a good time. Horace Horton would know what to do if he happened to drop by. And perhaps Mr. Price would be more willing to talk to Horton.

"Where are we going?" asked George Washington.

"We're going to see your girl friend. If we have to waste time on interrogation I'd rather speak to someone near the top. As long as your Jaguar hasn't been towed away."

"But she tried to kill me. She won't talk."

"Have you ever heard of anyone being killed by sounds?"

"I haven't heard of a lot of things."

"You would have lost consciousness, and then you would have had a headache for several days. We might be able to lean on her."

They drove along streets containing billboards, past people handing out leaflets, nearly running over a sandwich man, all proclaiming salvation through

Herbert W. Sinclair. He was being interviewed on television tonight and his photograph was in the evening papers. Posters assailed them and the name Sinclair screamed at them from every direction. The publicity machine was creating the usual impression that everybody was thinking of Herbert W. Sinclair. People were turning to salvation. God was this week's gimmick. Come to Harringay stadium tomorrow night. Don't miss this chance to find Christ. For two weeks only.

"Hi there, Eric, glad you could come. Ha ha ha."

Emma watched the man called Eric trot round the track after Herbert W. Sinclair to discuss the television coverage. Keep your body fit for God, the man had said before setting off on the course. His various interviewers managed short distances and then dropped out looking foolish. They hadn't read the Bible for years.

Emma was behaving herself now.

When Herbert W. Sinclair trotted back into the enclosure she gave him a winner's smile and posed for photographs again. Yes, she told the reporter, she was leading the choir throughout the crusade. "Dr. Sinclair's such a wonderful person. I feel I owe it to him and Jesus Christ. We're trying to save this country."

"Do you approve of the accent on violence—?"

"Hey, that's a little unfair on Emma. Ha ha ha. You'll confuse the girl. She's a simple Christian doing what she thinks is right. You should ask *me* questions like that."

"Dr. Sinclair, do you approve of the accent on violence—?"

"Well, feller, I think we overlook the fact that the church began as a militant body." He put his arm round the reporter's shoulders and walked up and down with him. "All those early Christians were prepared to die for Jesus and they won through by fighting for their faith. This was the story for years. My crusade may remind you that it was once considered honourable for knights to go off to the Holy Land and fight for Christianity. But the church has lost its direction recently, and I'm trying to demonstrate the right lines. It isn't the Romans now, or the Saracens, but it's a threat to Jesus. That's why I want to impress on the youth of today that you mustn't be *afraid* of violence. If Christians are afraid of communism then we're all doomed.'

In Cable Street four teenagers ran along the pavement after a bearded youth. "Beatnik," they shouted after him. "Peacenik !" "Vietnik!" The bearded youth

ran into a block of council flats where a ten year old tripped him up. “No no, please. What are you doing?” They were beating him up. A rather scraggy kid of fifteen kicked him in the groin, which reduced him to a screaming heap, and a fat one with spots silenced him with a milk bottle over the head.

“Young people,” said Steed, “finding an outlet for their high spirits.”

He climbed from the car and hurried over to the melee. He felt a little sick, actually; the sight of the four kids kicking that unconscious body reminded him of Gloria Munday’s pointless death. They ran off when they saw him coming, but not far off, and they threw a couple of bricks to show their contempt for commie students. Pinko, they shouted, bloody weirdie!

“What does one do about fights like this?” asked George Washington.

“One punches Herbert W. Sinclair on the nose.”

Washington looked as if he despaired of the decadent Europeans. “What do those kids care about pinko weirdies?” he asked. “They ask only for permission to punch someone on nose. Is there any other country in the world where this could be channelled into a revolution?”

“I suspect there are dozens. Did you enjoy torturing Mr. Price?”

“You wouldn’t let me.”

Horace Horton giggled. “I enjoy torture,” he said to Emma. “I’ve been promising myself this pleasure since you humiliated me on board S.S. *Gloria*. I was taught to enjoy it by the communists in Spain thirty years ago. They tortured me, and sometimes when I wake up in the night I can still hear their laughter. But now it’s my turn to laugh.”

Emma was strapped to a table and there was a band round her forehead, but she could still see the pudgy little man bouncing around the room in triumph. “You can’t kill me,” she said easily, “because the others want me to lead the teenagers in their revolt.”

“Quite,” he agreed eagerly. “I’m only here to discipline you. I want to make sure you don’t misbehave at a crucial moment.” He bent over her, and she could smell the perspiration again. He was an unhealthy sort of character. “I’m going to train you, as they train dogs in a circus.”

It transpired that dogs in a circus were trained to walk on their hind legs by wearing a collar with spikes on the inside. If the dog fell on to all fours the spikes dug into its neck. Whilst it remained upright the spikes didn’t stick in. Even a backward dog learnt quickly that way. Spikes are painful things.

“Now,” chuckled Horton, “let us suppose that we tell you to do something. If you do it, fine. We give you a lump of sugar. But if you don’t - yeow!”

A sledgehammer hit the inside of Emma's head. "And if you try to escape... or if we find that you can't be trusted..."

They had put a tiny transistor in Emma's ear. This time the screaming pain hit her so hard and kept on screaming that at last after half a second she passed out

There was no answer from Langulala's place in Wapping High Street. Steed was stationed round the corner to watch that she didn't slip out the back way into the river. But the studio flat seemed to be empty.

"How did you escape?" asked Steed.

"Over the roof. I climbed out of the skylight—"

"All right, I'll wait here while you go back."

He waited for nearly five minutes, and then he saw a slim, elegant woman leave the warehouse twenty-five yards down the street. She didn't look round or hurry. She walked sedately off towards the underground station. Steed followed her.

"Good afternoon. Miss Heatherington?" He raised his bowler and took her arm. "My name's John Steed. I've been looking forward to meeting you."

He wheeled her gently round and back in the direction she'd come from. They knocked on her front door and George Washington opened it. "Come in, Miss Langulala," he grinned.

"Can I come in?" asked Horace Horton. "It's a long time until tomorrow and I feel like a soldier in the trenches waiting for the dawn to come up. Have you ever waited for a battle to begin?" He sat on the bunk opposite her. They were in what seemed to be a wartime shelter in the sub-basement of the building. "I remember the last battle I waited for, and that was in 1937. We lost."

"It's getting to be a habit," said Emma.

"It was a small village a few miles outside Madrid, and we knew it was going to be a tough fight. We'd captured the local police chief and he told us the communists had nearly two hundred men in the place. But our orders were to take it at any cost. By moving in at dawn; we'd have a pitched battle with the guards but the rest of their battalion would take fifteen minutes or more to organise themselves." He smiled tragically. "We knew the first stage of the operation would cost us thirty or forty men, and then we'd swarm through for a massacre. By mid-day we would be in control, and we could spend the afternoon killing a few petty officials to scare the peasants into submission. A little blood and a few wailing wives to the glory of General Franco. It was a simple plan."

Emma was feeling the tension of pre-crusade nerves herself and she found it difficult to spurn the phoney comradeship. Talking to anyone was better than solitary confinement with the rats and the stale smell of damp foundations.

"It would have worked if we hadn't been betrayed. We crawled up the hill at five o'clock in the morning and found all two hundred men waiting for us. They let us creep right to the edge of the town and then they opened fire. They shot the ones who tried to run away. Seventeen men were shot in the back, the lucky swine. They died quickly."

Those were the good old days when right was left and wrong was right, when there were brave causes worth dying for and idealism had an outlet. When George Orwell stopped playing the part of a tramp and started playing soldiers. "Those were the days," she murmured.

"Sixty-three of us were captured, more or less. I mean, we weren't taken prisoner. We were butchered, castrated, and used to amuse the villagers. They had a public holiday that day. And by nightfall there wasn't a sober Spaniard in the place. There were three of us left alive."

He wasn't talking to Emma any more, if he ever had been, he was sitting on the bunk thirty years ago and trembling on the point of tears at his personal dismemberment.

"People always laugh at a man who is castrated. Do you understand why it's so funny? We were rescued by the village priest when the soldiers were drunk and the villagers had staggered off to bed. We were carried to safety at three or four in the morning, almost dead from loss of blood. And even the nuns who nursed us were giggling. Why is it so funny? Do you remember the Rhythm Girls on the boat laughing when that Australian D.J. made fun of me? I've had to reconcile myself to the joke. I've had to laugh myself. Do you want to see me laugh?"

"No," said Emma.

"I laughed when I went back to that village after the war. I was a rich tourist and I walked through the main street without giving a dime to the beggars. I gloated over their poverty, laughed at their misery, and in the evening I went to a brothel and bought every girl in the place."

"What did you do with them?"

"I paid them a price they couldn't turn down, for the pleasure of half killing them. I've been laughing ever since. I doubt if those girls worked again for weeks !"

The fat little man with his shiny complexion lapsed into gloomy silence. She wasn't laughing at him, but some men are not simpatico. "Never mind," she said awkwardly, "if you lose the battle tomorrow the British police won't use those

methods. A friend of mine was in prison a fortnight ago and he's still irrepressible. They put bromide in the tea and leave it at that."

"I think we shall win tomorrow," said Horace, "because we've nothing to lose. At the worst Herbert W. Sinclair will make a few converts and rate as this year's Billy Graham; nobody will care. There isn't any risk."

"So what are you doing here?" asked Emma. "Reminiscing. You get like that when you're middle aged."

Emma laughed at him.

Steed laughed delightedly. "The nice thing about my job is that it keeps me so young," he said. "Did you realise that I'm several years older than Washington? It comes of being on the side of righteousness. I'm sure you'll find yourself getting younger every day—"

"I refuse to listen—"

"My dear Miss Heatherington, you are one of us. If you'd stayed with Hungry Horace you would have ended up in gaol. He needs a few people in gaol, a few trials to demonstrate the national persecution of his movement. That's why he is so untidy, leaving people like Nick and that secretary about the place. You'll all be arrested and thrown into gaol if his plot comes off, and naturally you'll be arrested and thrown into gaol if it fails."

"I refuse—"

"It doesn't matter. You'll still do as I say. Washington will help you, he's a fully paid-up member of the technicians' union, and he's instructed to put you across his knee if we have the slightest trouble."

She looked at George Washington and smiled in spite of herself.

"The only way to stop ten million teenage listeners to Radio Gloria from rioting is to tell them not to. Use your own methods in reverse."

George Washington flashed his teeth in that way that made her knees tremble. "Come along, Langulala, we must start at once. There's very little time. Come along! I'm de boss suh now."

Steed watched the happy couple go off on their mission. Love, he reflected, was a wonderful thing. Well, sex. It smoothed the paths of treachery, convinced where reason failed and justified where conscience balked.

9

Emma sings the blues

The crowds began arriving at Harringay Stadium nearly two hours before the crusade was due to start. A joyful mob singing hymns and wearing hats, singlets and badges with the slogan "I Fight for Peace". Then the charabancs rolled up, hundreds of them, from local churches all over the London area; old ladies searching for reassurance and front pew fashion setters and sides-men aware of their respectability. As seven-thirty drew near the audience outnumbered the two thousand officials, ushers and policemen.

"Choir through entrance G," they shouted through megaphones.

"Closed circuit television to the rear of the stadium!"

"Ticket holders straight through please!"

Then a hymn began blaring through the loudspeakers. It was better than a cup final. The stewards pushed, hectored and drove the ninety-five thousand people into order as if it were Nuremberg in 1937, and the lonely men in raincoats, the typists clutching their virginity for Jesus and the holier than thousands went where they were sent and waited for transformation.

Inside the stadium, in the middle of the far side, was a raised platform. All seats faced this platform, the floodlights were focused on it, the battery of microphones issued from it, just as the hymns and the prayers and the introductions built up inexorably to the appearance on this platform of Herbert W. Sinclair. The choir was already in its place and "Fight the Good Fight" was reverberating through the arena. Salesmen were moving among the crowds with books, magazines, newspapers and peanuts. The atmosphere was building up to the hypnotic moment.

A cheer leader led them in prayer, told them they were an historic audience, welcomed parties from Tunbridge Wells and Tooting so that they could cheer themselves and introduced celebrities. This was, he said modestly, an occasion. And the applause thundered up in waves towards the platform. A massive noise from the sea of faces extending for hundreds of yards in every direction like the threshing of a vast animal.

"Ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls, let's get into the mood to receive Jesus Christ by listening reverently to that great old religious affirmation, 'I Believe'.

Sung for you by the one and only Emma Peel!"

A roar came up from the monster as she went to the microphone. They were on her side at the moment, but - she couldn't suppress a shudder at the thought of them turning nasty, as they were meant to eventually. She put a hand up to her ear and felt the transistor. Then the amplified crash of guitars reduced the audience to awful silence. She began singing.

Five hours earlier she had watched the REEL helicopter swing into the stadium and land on the grass centre. It had been a surprise visit from that executive woman, but the real surprise for Emma had been a grinning George Washington loping along beside her. He had indulged himself in a tiresome bit of farce, shaking hands with Emma and telling her that she had a great white sound and asking for her autograph. There is such a thing as enjoying yourself too much.

After ten minutes the helicopter had taken off again. So much for those heroic rescues and melodramatic flourishes that George Washington boasted of. She had watched it disappear into the clouds with a feeling of despair. They were leaving her to face the gruesome bit alone.

The gruesome bit was starting when she left the platform to a deafening reception. It wasn't like clapping or cheering from a normal audience; more like the claustrophobic roar of a burning building with Mrs. Peel inside it waiting for the walls to collapse. And the noise swelled up impossibly as Herbert W. Sinclair went out to meet his people. They screamed and thundered to the point of hysteria. It was naked demagogy.

"Great, Emma, you bounced that song out like a Christian." Nick Dickinson gloomily took her arm. "If we ever get to America together I'll introduce you to Mahalia Jackson. And if we don't I'll introduce you to Bessie Smith. She's dead."

"Hell," piped Horace Horton, "will be here on earth, so there's no need to die." He wobbled his stomach as he laughed. "You see, it's already starting." He pointed out of the window.

Far below on the street side Emma could see a group of demonstrators carrying placards. "Go home and preach Christianity to the Pepsi-Cola country." "Tell the Texan oil millionaires about God." "Jesus Christ was Coloured." Bearded peaceniks - undesirable types who didn't wash, didn't pay their fares on the tube and who came up with the wrong answers to undesirable questions. But the twelve disciples were dealing with them. The twelve cheer-leaders were smashing the banners over their unwashed heads.

"I know we're all worried about the Chinese and the Africans, we're worried about Viet Nam and Korea and Cuba, we're worried because the world is

dividing up into a war between white and black, or white and yellow. Race is scaring the pants off all of us. Those of us who aren't too scared of cancer or being killed in a car crash to think about those things. Those of us who aren't unhappily married, lonely, or ill. You have to be pretty fit to worry about right and wrong. You have to be at peace with yourself to worry about war.

"I know, if you're sick or unhappy you don't give a damn about the problems around you. Let communism come or go, who cares, and let the kids get hooked on drugs and alcohol and sex. Juvenile delinquency is someone else's problem. It isn't your fault. You may be scared, but you're scared of yourself. You need Jesus Christ to give you a true perspective. You need Jesus to help you deal with yourself, to stop you being afraid of death and to help you make your marriage work. Drugs won't help, and alcohol won't work, communism won't solve your personal problems and nobody thinks it will. People just don't care. But if we're to achieve salvation we must start to care. We must fight cynicism.

"There are kids out there who think that youth is the time to rave and live and react against the adult world, at the adult world's expense. The time to rebel, against decency and morality. I've read about the don't-give-a-damn that hides beneath the cloak of progress. Bring those kids into the arena, stewards, and let's have a look at them. Let me talk to them. They need to learn that Jesus cannot be mocked."

Herbert W. Sinclair was a superb demagogue; he took the simple fears of his audience, fears of cancer or youth or sex, fears of race or war, and by a rapid sleight of hand made it seem as if Christ was the answer. In fact he made it seem as if a fear of war was in some way atheistic, that a failed marriage was a failure in rapport with Christ and that success in business depended on belief in Jesus.

By the time the demonstrators had been dragged into the arena they were symbols of every secret fear of every person in Herbert W. Sinclair's congregation. Name your own neurosis and they stood for it. The hates of 95,000 people were directed against the unwashed this-or-that-niks who carried banners at the government's expense. It was all a pinko plot, something to do with the welfare state.

The storming of the Bastille was a rational operation by rational people compared with the yearnings for lynch law that Herbert W. Sinclair created. He harangued the offenders for making Christ cry out on the cross and asked them on his own behalf why they had forsaken him. He pointed the finger.

"Pray for forgiveness!" he commanded. "I want to see you down on your knees in submission to Jesus," he called, "and then I want you to go away and have your hair cut."

"Herbert W. Sinclair," said Emma, "is less like the early Christians than a

Roman emperor. He's going to throw those poor kids to the lions."

"That's the way to have a spiritual revolution," chuckled Horace Horton. "Put some colour into religion!"

"I'm going out there!"

"Stay where you are," Horace called after her. But she was running back down the stairs before he could stop her. She hurried through the tunnel into the pits and across the platform. With any luck she would be safe in front of 95,000 people. She could prevent the first riot and perhaps shame the audience into sanity before they knocked her out with a crash inside the head. They wouldn't dare do that to singing idol Emma Peel in public.

A cheer went up as she strode across the platform and then went down among the terrified demonstrators. "Get up," she hissed, "follow me before you get killed."

"Come back, Emma," called Herbert W. Sinclair. Ha ha ha. "You can't help those long haired delinquents."

While Sinclair shouted and threatened she herded the kids towards the exit. She ignored the commotion. None of the audience had decided yet whether she was taking them to salvation or causing trouble. But as she reached the steps from the arena she was struck down. It looked as if God was doing his duty, for she stayed unconscious on the ground without anybody having touched her.

John Steed adjusted his peaked cap, grabbed a stretcher and ran with three other St. John Ambulance men across the grass while the congregation watched in awed silence. They reached Emma Peel at the same time as two of the disciples. "Bring her back to the dressing rooms," one of them ordered. They lifted her onto the stretcher and carried her back.

Horace Horton was standing in the tunnel entrance and Steed walked straight past him without being recognised. A total change of uniform works wonders on the appearance. Makes you feel an imposter, of course, but Steed *was* an imposter. He knew as much about first aid as these genuine ones, though, and he guessed from the way that Emma had thrown her head to one side before collapsing that Sandra Heatherington had been up to her sound tricks again.

"Dr. Mathers," he murmured, "you'll find an electrode or some such in her left ear. Remove it before she regains consciousness. Don't gape, man. Do you think it was the wrath of God that hit her?"

They were in a dressing room below ground level, more like a prison cell, and Steed guessed this was where they had kept Emma for the last few days. He waited until Horton and three stewards had followed them into the room and

then closed the door. “Anybody who makes a false move receives a bullet in the stomach,” Steed announced. He was pointing a Walther 7.65 at anyone who was interested.

“Isn’t this premature?” Horace Horton flapped an arm towards the arena. “You’ll never escape from this place.”

Steed grinned. “My problem was to get in.” He would worry about getting out when the business part of the meeting was over. He glanced at his watch. The time was five minutes to nine. Time to kill. There was a knock at the door and someone asked whether they were all right.

“We’re doing rather well,” said Steed as he opened the door to Julius Silberbaum. “Come in. Don’t let this funereal uniform deter you.” He pulled Silberbaum into the room and then took the opportunity of removing the peaked cap. It wasn’t really his style. “Is there anybody else we should have down here?”

Emma’s slightly fey voice whispered from the stretcher. “Where’s Nick Dickinson?”

“He’s out there helping Dr. Sinclair with the electrical equipment. He knows about things like loudspeakers. Welcome back to the show.”

She climbed irritably to her feet. “You’ve been so long about it I thought you were back in gaol. Do you know how many days I’ve been—?”

One of the stewards had edged behind Silberbaum and now he made a dash for the door. Steed spun round and shot him through the head in a reflex action that he later decided was precipitate. It brought another ten characters running. But they stayed outside the door and chatted to each other when Horace Horton called a warning.

“I suppose you know what you’re doing,” Horton piped cheerfully. “Perhaps we’re meant to stay in this room for the rest of our lives?” It was a Horace Horton joke and he giggled.

Steed took another glance at his watch. It was half a minute to nine o’clock. “How do you envisage this evening’s end?” he asked.

“You’ll be killed,” Horton obliged. “Our stewards are not on this trip to pass round a collection plate. They’ll have you both torn to pieces by the crowd. Yes, yes, it’s easily arranged. It happened to Gloria Munday when she was being difficult and there have been no repercussions. You know what mobs are like.” He giggled again. “And by the end of the week we shall have a mob on our side extending throughout the country. But you know all this, Steed. I’m surprised that you haven’t used your intelligence and kept away.”

“I don’t have your low opinion of the British public,” said Steed.

That sounded slightly priggish when you heard it over the radio, but it was

intended to lead Horton on and it worked. Ellis Dee was listening through his earphones beaming with lethargic satisfaction at George Washington. “It’s going out loud and clear,” he drawled.

George Washington nodded. “I only hope it works. De boss suh sounds as if he’s in trouble. Needs me there to look after him.”

“He seems to get everybody rushing round to help him,” snapped Langulala. “That blandly attractive Englishman pose is too bloody tiresome coming from such a ruthless operator. I mean, what’s so devastating about a man who gives you a charming smile as he kills you?” She was pacing up and down like a hockey mistress in training. Didn’t really believe that George Washington would guarantee her safety. Langulala! She wasn’t used to this life.

“This is Ellis Dee bringing you the facts about Herbert W. Sinclair’s crusade - live from London. Stay with Radio Gloria, guys and girls, for the truth behind the gossip columns. We’ll be playing you more records towards the end of the show, but we just thought you might like to know...”

He flicked the microphone switch off and turned the mix dial back up for the drama to continue, seven minutes past the hour of nine o’clock. “If things begin to look dull,” he murmured, “I’ll bring in a commercial. Otherwise we’ll carry straight through until the weather on the half hour.”

“Do you think this will make the slightest difference?” asked Miss Heatherington.

Ellis Dee lit a cigarette before answering. “I guess it means I’ll have to apply to the B.B.C. for a job.”

“I’m still scared,” said Miss Heatherington.

“Do you want to sleep with me tonight?” Ellis offered.

George Washington made encouraging noises, he wasn’t possessive and all that. Goddam Steed. Langulala said it was a generous idea but they wouldn’t be staying that long. They’d done what they’d come to do, to wire up the receiver for broadcasting from one of Julius Silberbaum’s cigars, until he tried to smoke it. They were only hanging on from curiosity.

“It will work,” Silberbaum was explaining, “because that congregation out there needs something - God or a feeling of being cared for - so much that they’ll destroy anybody who tries to take it away from them. They’re sheep, they want to obey, like our teenagers who want to obey, they want to fight and beat up the better educated, more privileged students. We tell them they can. So how can our little scheme fail, Mr. Steed? The whole country loves a bit of drama. You can see the reporters out there now taking pictures of the fights. You can see the policemen out there doing nothing to prevent the trouble...”

That wasn’t entirely true. The 95,000 people had listened to the strange voices

coming through the loudspeakers for several minutes while Herbert W. Sinclair harangued a dead microphone. Then when they realised what was happening they had begun moving sheepishly towards the exists. Herbert W. Sinclair had shouted desperately, and they ignored him. The stewards had pushed and pleaded, and they ignored them. The crusade was over.

Sinclair leaped athletically off the platform and ran blaspheming round to the control room. He found Nick Dickinson sitting at the instrument panel. “Hi,” said Nick, “great to see you again. Ha ha ha.”

“What the hell’s going on?”

“Telling the people and all that crap, you know, using your own techniques—”

“I’ll have you killed for this!”

“No you won’t, sir,” said a voice behind them. It was a policeman. They had come running into the building when Steed had decided it was time to end the broadcast. Horace Horton had begun blustering about American armies invading Britain. “Shut up,” snapped Steed. He fired a shot straight into the floor between Horace’s feet. That shut him up. Such ravings would surprise the United States as much as it would surprise Britain; better left to the intoxicating atmosphere of Texan bar rooms.

Steed listened to the scuffle outside the door and then opened it to the sudden invasion of policemen.

“Well, Mrs. Peel,” he sighed. “Mission accomplished?”

She nodded. “But I wish sometimes you could do the suffering bit so that *I* could rescue *you*. It’s been a trying week.”

While Steed chuckled blandly a policeman tapped him on the shoulder. “Isn’t your name John Steed? Don’t move! John Steed? I’ll have to ask you to come with me, in connection with an escape from Kirkham prison...”

Emma shrugged. Maybe she wouldn’t rescue him after all.

10

A woman and her Black & Decker

At seven o'clock of the cold and misty morning a side door of H.M. Prison, Kirkham, creaked open.

"And don't let me see you in 'ere again!"

Steed touched the rim of his bowler, swung his umbrella in jaunty style and made for the road. As he reached the corner he ducked away, looked round anxiously and then fled into a workman's café. Coming down the road he had caught a glimpse of Bunny Bennett's 4½-litre Bentley.

"Morning, Mr. S.," called a voice from the first table. "Out dead on time, eh? Let me get you some bacon and eggs."

"What the hell are you doing here?" It was a miserable morning hundreds of miles from civilisation and he'd spent two days in that damned prison before official channels had succeeded in having him released. "I know, you've come to take me home. So let's get going. I'm not hungry."

"You must admit you've been getting into mischief, Mr. S. Blundering about as His Nibs put it, upsetting Lady Forbes-Benson and nearly bankrupting an important industry without even a few reassuring arrests to show at the end of it. His Nibs said he isn't giving you any more holidays. Did you know that a captain of industry committed suicide yesterday?"

It was the longest drive back to London he had ever suffered. Went on for hours. Boring. If only Benson would shut up.... The front page news was that Horace Horton had been found dead in his flat dressed in a black rubber suit. And the crossword was difficult. Somebody different always set the crossword on Thursdays. "I suppose you don't happen to have a bottle of brandy in the boot of this taxi?"

"I'm a working man, Mr. S. I enjoy a pint on a Friday night when the missis lets me, but I'm not a bleedin' St. Bernard. Better wait till you reach Mrs. Peel's place for lunch. She's laid on a spread for you, I'll bet, with all the caviar and oysters and booze."

Benson had a way of making you lose your appetite. They reached the tall house in Primrose Hill just before one o'clock and Steed was tempted to skip over to the pub as soon as Benson had disappeared. But he went up in the lift to

the top floor. It was all part of the job.

The door to Emma's studio was immediately opposite the lift gates. As the lift purred to a stop Steed knew that something was happening in her flat. There was a hideous screaming sound like a thousand dentists' drills shrilling in agony from behind her door. He sprang across the passage and hammered on the door.

There was no answer, and the yell of suffering continued. It could be a human noise, of someone being tortured beyond endurance, or the shrill of the torture instrument. "Mrs. Peel!" he called. "Mrs. Peel! " But the appalling noise continued, behind the door and running horribly up and down his spine. He had once heard a rabbit making that noise, down in the country, just before it died of myxamitosis.

He spent three minutes picking the lock, aware that every second was an eternal agony and three minutes was a medieval hell to Mrs. Peel making that noise. Eventually he threw the door open and rushed in with umbrella at the ready. And the din stopped instantly.

"Steed! How did you get in?"

He shrugged languidly. "You must have left the door open."

Emma Peel was standing on top of a step ladder before the huge slab of concrete in the middle of the floor. She had been drilling at it for hours; a woman and her Black & Decker. "Do you like my sculpture?" she asked.

"Charming. What are you going to call it?"

"I thought perhaps The Universal Victim."

"Very telling." He decided it would be indiscreet to ask how she got the slab of stone into her flat, or how she would get it out. "A nicely abstract subject, but it sounded right from the hall."

While Emma removed her smock Steed prowled into the kitchen and found the antipasto di primavera, which was very nice for a May afternoon. Salad was just the meal, and when she intercepted his glance at the wall-cocktail cabinet and produced a bottle of the finest brandy he decided that it was not only May but Summer.

"Napoleon may have been a villain, but he left us one or two things to be thankful for," he sighed. "Cheers. Could Horace Horton's mob of reactionaries have said the same?"

"I suppose not." She was wearing a blue, crêpe cat-suit under the smock, and curled up on the pastel divan with her drink she looked rather beguiling. "But I felt sorry for Horton. He was in the Spanish civil war, and some nasty things happened to him. I can understand how he felt. Losing his manhood and putting on weight like that... "

"Castrated? Good lord." Steed poured himself another brandy. "What I always

say," he said vaguely, "is that if you're still alive you haven't much to complain about."

"He's dead now."

"True. And Sinclair has gone back to America with Julius Silberbaum. What have *we* to complain about?"

"What I have to complain about," said Emma, "is that I'm due in the television studios at half past three, for rehearsals. My new record is just out and I'm appearing on Top of the Pops tonight."

The days of tranquil listening to Emma at the harpsichord were over. Steed stared sadly at the bottom of his brandy glass. "I suppose you couldn't get me a job as the man who sings ba-doo-ba-ba in the background? I have quite a pleasing baritone... "

"You can be my chauffeur for the afternoon. Just because you know me so much better than you knew Gloria Munday doesn't mean that you can leave me to the hordes of autograph hunters undefended."

Steed nodded. Driving cars was something that he was good at.